

We Are the Living

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ERSKINE CALDWELL

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Call It Experience

We Are the Living

STORIES BY
ERSKINE CALDWELL



HEINEMANN

LONDON MELBOURNE TORONTO

William Heinemann Ltd
LONDON MELBOURNE TORONTO
CAPE TOWN AUCKLAND
THE HAGUE

First published in Great Britain 1906

Printed in Great Britain
by Billing and Sons Limited
Guildford and London

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We Are the Living

Warm River

THE driver stopped at the suspended footbridge and pointed out to me the house across the river. I paid him the quarter fare for the ride from the station two miles away and stepped from the car. After he had gone I was alone with the chill night and the star-pointed lights twinkling in the valley and the broad green river flowing warm below me. All around me the mountains rose like black clouds in the night, and only by looking straight heavenward could I see anything of the dim afterglow of sunset.

The creaking footbridge swayed with the rhythm of my stride and the momentum of its swing soon overcame my pace. Only by walking faster and faster could I cling to the pendulum as it swung in its wide arc over the river. When at last I could see the other side, where the mountain came down abruptly and slid under the warm water, I gripped my handbag tighter and ran with all my might.

Even then, even after my feet had crunched upon the gravel path, I was afraid. I knew that by day I might walk the bridge without fear; but at night, in a strange country, with dark mountains towering all around me and a broad green river flowing beneath me, I could not keep my hands from trembling and my heart from pounding against my chest.

I found the house easily, and laughed at myself for having run from the river. The house was the first one to come upon after leaving the footbridge, and even if I should have missed it, Gretchen would have called me. She was there on the steps of the porch waiting for me. When I heard her familiar voice calling my name, I was ashamed of myself for having been frightened by the mountains and the broad river flowing below.

She ran down the gravel path to meet me.

"Did the footbridge frighten you, Richard?" she asked excitedly, holding my arm with both of her hands and guiding me up the path to the house.

"I think it did, Gretchen," I said; "but I hope I outran it."

"Everyone tries to do that at first, but after going over it once, it's like walking a tight-rope. I used to walk tight-ropes when I was small—didn't you do that, too, Richard? We had a rope stretched across the floor of our barn to practice on."

"I did, too, but it's been so long ago I've forgotten how to do it now."

We reached the steps and went up to the porch. Gretchen took me to the door. Someone inside the house was bringing a lamp into the hall, and with the coming of the light I saw Gretchen's two sisters standing just inside the open door.

"This is my little sister, Anne," Gretchen said. "And this is Mary."

I spoke to them in the semi-darkness, and we went

on into the hall. Gretchen's father was standing beside a table holding the lamp a little to one side so that he could see my face. I had not met him before.

"This is my father," Gretchen said. "He was afraid you wouldn't be able to find our house in the dark."

"I wished to bring a light down to the bridge and meet you, but Gretchen said you would get here without any trouble. Did you get lost? I could have brought a lantern down with no trouble at all."

I shook hands with him and told him how easily I had found the place.

"The hack driver pointed out to me the house from the other side of the river, and I never once took my eyes from the light. If I had lost sight of the light, I'd probably be stumbling around somewhere now in the dark down there getting ready to fall into the water."

He laughed at me for being afraid of the river.

"You wouldn't have minded it. The river is warm. Even in winter, when there is ice and snow underfoot, the river is as warm as a comfortable room. All of us here love the water down there."

"No, Richard, you wouldn't have fallen in," Gretchen said, laying her hand in mine. "I saw you the moment you got out of the hack, and if you had gone a step in the wrong direction, I was ready to run to you."

I wished to thank Gretchen for saying that, but already she was going to the stairs to the floor above, and calling me. I went with her, lifting my handbag in front

of me. There was a shaded lamp, lighted but turned low, on the table at the end of the upper hall, and she picked it up and went ahead into one of the front rooms.

We stood for a moment looking at each other, and silent.

"There is fresh water in the pitcher, Richard. If there is anything else you would like to have, please tell me. I tried not to overlook anything."

"Don't worry, Gretchen," I told her. "I couldn't wish for anything more. It's enough just to be here with you, anyway. There's nothing else I care for."

She looked at me quickly, and then she lowered her eyes to the floor. We stood silently for several minutes, while neither of us could think of anything to say. I wished to tell her how glad I was to be with her, even if it was only for one night, but I knew I could say that to her later. Gretchen knew why I had come.

"I'll leave the lamp for you, Richard, and I'll wait downstairs for you on the porch. Come as soon as you are ready."

She had left before I could offer to carry the light to the stairhead for her to see the way down. By the time I had picked up the lamp, she was out of sight down the stairs.

I walked back into the room and closed the door and bathed my face and hands, scrubbing the train-dust with brush and soap. There was a row of hand-embroidered towels on the rack, and I took one and dried my face and hands. After that I combed my hair, and found a

fresh handkerchief in the handbag. Then I opened the door and went downstairs to find Gretchen.

Her father was on the porch with her. When I walked through the doorway, he got up and gave me chair between them. Gretchen pulled her chair closer to mine, touching my arm with her hand.

"Is this the first time you have been up here in the mountains, Richard?" her father asked me, turning in his chair towards me.

"I've never been within a hundred miles of here before, sir. It's a different country up here, but I suppose you would think the same about the coast, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, but Father used to live in Norfolk," Gretchen said. "Didn't you, Father?"

"I lived there for nearly three years."

There was something else he would say, and both of us waited for him to continue.

"Father is a master mechanic," Gretchen whispered to me. "He works in the railroad shops."

"Yes," he said after a while, "I've lived in many places, but here is where I wish to stay."

My first thought was to ask him why he preferred the mountains to other sections, but suddenly I was aware that both he and Gretchen were strangely silent. Between them, I sat wondering about it.

After a while he spoke again, not to me and not to Gretchen, but as though he were speaking to someone else on the porch, a fourth person whom I had failed to

see in the darkness. I waited, tense and excited, for him to continue.

Gretchen moved her chair a few inches closer to mine, her motions gentle and without sound. The warmth of the river came up and covered us like a blanket on a chill night.

"After Gretchen and the other two girls lost their mother," he said, almost inaudibly, bending forward over his knees and gazing out across the broad green river, "after we lost their mother, I came back to the mountains to live. I couldn't stay in Norfolk, and I couldn't stand it in Baltimore. This was the only place on earth where I could find peace. Gretchen remembers her mother, but neither of you can yet understand how it is with me. Her mother and I were born here in the mountains, and we lived here together for almost twenty years. Then after she left us, I moved away, foolishly believing that I could forget. But I was wrong. Of course I was wrong. A man can't forget the mother of his children, even though he knows he will never see her again."

Gretchen leaned closer to me, and I could not keep my eyes from her darkly framed profile beside me. The river below us made no sound; but the warmth of its vapor would not let me forget that it was still there.

Her father had bent farther forward in his chair until his arms were resting on his knees, and he seemed to be trying to see someone on the other side of the river, high on the mountain top above it. His eyes strained

and the shaft of light that came through the open doorway fell upon them and glistened there. Tears fell from his face like fragments of stars, burning into his quivering hands until they were out of sight.

Presently, still in silence, he got up and moved through the doorway. His huge shadow fell upon Gretchen and me as he stood there momentarily before going inside. I turned and looked towards him but, even though he was passing from sight, I could not keep my eyes upon him.

Gretchen leaned closer against me, squeezing her fingers into the hollow of my hand and touching my shoulder with her cheeks as though she were trying to wipe something from them. Her father's footsteps grew fainter, and at last we could no longer hear him.

Somewhere below us, along the bank of the river, an express train crashed down the valley, creaking and screaming through the night. Occasionally its lights flashed through the openings in the darkness, dancing on the broad green river like polar lights in the north, and the metallic echo of its steel rumbled against the high walls of the mountains.

Gretchen clasped her hands tightly over my hand, trembling to her finger tips.

"Richard, why did you come to see me?"

Her voice was mingled with the screaming metallic echo of the train that now seemed far off.

I had expected to find her looking up into my face, but when I turned to her, I saw that she was gazing

far down into the valley, down into the warm waters of the river. She knew why I had come, but she did not wish to hear me say why I had.

I did not know why I had come to see her, now. I had liked Gretchen, and I had desired her above anyone else I knew. But I could not tell her that I loved her, after having heard her father speak of love. I was sorry I had come, now after having heard him speak of Gretchen's mother as he did. I knew Gretchen would give herself to me, because she knew I had come for that only, and because she loved me; but I had nothing to give her in return. She was beautiful, very beautiful, and I had desired her. That was before. Now, I knew that I could never again think of her as I had come prepared.

"Why did you come, Richard?"

"Why?"

"Yes, Richard; why?"

My eyes closed, and what I felt was the memory of the star-pointed lights twinkling down in the valley and the warmth of the river flowing below and the caress of her fingers as she touched my arm.

"Richard, please tell me why you came."

"I don't know why I came, Gretchen."

"If you only loved me as I love you, Richard, you would know why."

Her fingers trembled in my hand. I knew she loved me. There had been no doubt in my mind from the first. Gretchen loved me.

"Perhaps I should not have come," I said. "I made a mistake, Gretchen. I should have stayed away."

"But you will be here only for tonight, Richard. You are leaving early in the morning. You aren't sorry that you came for just this short time, are you, Richard?"

"I'm not sorry that I am here, Gretchen, but I should not have come. I didn't know what I was doing. I haven't any right to come here. People who love each other are the only ones——"

"But you do love me just a little, don't you, Richard? You couldn't possibly love me nearly so much as I love you, but can't you tell me that you do love me just a little? I'll feel much happier after you have gone, Richard."

"I don't know," I said, trembling.

"Richard, please——"

With her hands in mine I held her tightly. Suddenly I felt something coming over me, a thing that stabbed my body with its quickness. It was as if the words her father had uttered were becoming clear to me. I had not realized before that there was such a love as he had spoken of. I had believed that men never loved women in the same way that a woman loved a man, but now I knew there could be no difference.

We sat silently, holding each other's hands for a long time. It was long past midnight, because the lights in the valley below were being turned out; but time did not matter.

Gretchen clung softly to me, looking up into my face

and laying her cheek against my shoulder. She was as much mine as a woman ever belongs to a man, but I knew then that I could never force myself to take advantage of her love, and to go away knowing that I had not loved her as she loved me. I had not believed any such thing when I came. I had traveled all that distance to hold her in my arms for a few hours, and then to forget her, perhaps forever.

When it was time for us to go into the house, I got up and put my arms around her. She trembled when I touched her, but she clung to me as tightly as I held her, and the hammering of her heart drove into me, stroke after stroke, like an expanding wedge, the spears of her breasts.

"Richard, kiss me before you go," she said.

She ran to the door, holding it open for me. She picked up the lamp from the table and walked ahead up the stairs to the floor above.

At my door she waited until I could light her lamp, and then she handed me mine.

"Good night, Gretchen," I said.

"Good night, Richard."

I turned down the wick of her lamp to keep it from smoking, and then she went across the hall towards her room.

"I'll call you in the morning in time for you to catch your train, Richard."

"All right, Gretchen. Don't let me over-sleep, because it leaves the station at seven-thirty."

"I'll wake you in plenty of time, Richard," she said.

The door was closed after her, and I turned and went into my room. I shut the door and slowly began to undress for the night. After I had blown out the lamp and had got into bed, I lay tensely awake. I knew I could never go to sleep, and I sat up in bed and smoked cigarette after cigarette, blowing the smoke through the screen at the window. The house was quiet. Occasionally, I thought I heard the sounds of muffled movements in Gretchen's room across the hall, but I was not certain.

I could not determine how long a time I had sat there on the edge of the bed, stiff and erect, thinking of Gretchen, when suddenly I found myself jumping to my feet. I opened the door and ran across the hall. Gretchen's door was closed, but I knew it would not be locked, and I turned the knob noiselessly. A slender shaft of light broke through the opening I had made. It was not necessary to open the door wider, because I saw Gretchen only a few steps away, almost within arm's reach of me. I closed my eyes tightly for a moment, thinking of her as I had all during the day's ride up from the coast.

Gretchen had not heard me open her door, and she did not know I was there. Her lamp was burning brightly on the table.

I had not expected to find her awake, and I had thought surely she would be in bed. She knelt on the

rug beside her bed, her head bowed over her arms and her body shaken with sobs.

Gretchen's hair was lying over her shoulders, tied over the top of her head with a pale blue ribbon. Her nightgown was white silk, hemmed with a delicate lace, and around her neck the collar of lace was thrown open.

I knew how beautiful she was when I saw her then, even though I had always thought her lovely. I had never seen a girl so beautiful as Gretchen.

She had not heard me at her door, and she still did not know I was there. She knelt beside her bed, her hands clenched before her, crying.

When I had first opened the door, I did not know what I was about to do; but now that I had seen her in her room, kneeling in prayer beside her bed, unaware that I was looking upon her and hearing her words and sobs, I was certain that I could never care for anyone else as I did for her. I had not known until then, but in the revelation of a few seconds I knew that I did love her.

I closed the door softly and went back to my room. There I found a chair and placed it beside the window to wait for the coming of day. At the window I sat and looked down into the bottom of the valley where the warm river lay. As my eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness, I felt as if I were coming closer and closer to it, so close that I might have reached out and touched the warm water with my hands.

Later in the night, towards morning, I thought I

heard someone in Gretchen's room moving softly over the floor as one who would go from window to window. Once I was certain I heard someone in the hall, close to my door.

When the sun rose over the top of the mountain, I got up and dressed. Later, I heard Gretchen leave her room and go downstairs. I knew she was hurrying to prepare breakfast for me before I left to get on the train. I waited a while, and after a quarter of an hour I heard her coming back up the stairs. She knocked softly on my door, calling my name several times.

I jerked open the door and faced her. She was so surprised at seeing me there, when she had expected to find me still asleep, that she could not say anything for a moment.

"Gretchen," I said, grasping her hands, "don't hurry to get me off—I'm not going back this morning—I don't know what was the matter with me last night—I know now that I love you——"

"But, Richard—last night you said——"

"I did say last night that I was going back early this morning, Gretchen, but I didn't know what I was talking about. I'm not going back now until you go with me. I'll tell you what I mean as soon as breakfast is over. But first of all I wish you would show me how to get down to the river. I have got to go down there right away and feel the water with my hands."

We Are Looking at You, Agnes

THERE must be a way to get it over with. If somebody would only say something about it, instead of looking at me all the time as they do, when I am in the room, there wouldn't be any more days like this one. But no one ever says a word about it. They sit and look at me all the time—like that—but not even Papa says anything.

Why don't they go ahead and say it—why don't they do something— They know it; everyone knows it now. Everybody looks at me like that, but nobody ever says a word about it.

Papa knows perfectly well that I never went to business college with the money he sent me. Why doesn't he say so— He put me on the train and said, Be a good little girl, Agnes. Just before the train left he gave me fifty dollars, and promised to send me the same amount monthly through October. When I reached Birmingham, I went to a beauty-culture school and learned how to be a manicurist with the money he sent me. Everybody at home thought I was studying shorthand at the business college. They thought I was a stenographer in Birmingham, but I was a manicurist in a three-chair barbershop. It was not long until in some way everybody at home found out what I was doing. Why didn't

they tell me then that they knew what I was doing— Why didn't they say something about it——

Ask me, Papa, why I became a manicurist instead of learning to be a stenographer. After you ask me that, I'll tell you why I'm not even a manicurist in a three-chair barbershop any longer. But say something about it. Say you know it; say you know what I do; say anything. Please, for God's sake, don't sit there all day long and look at me like that without saying something about it. Tell me that you have always known it; tell me anything, Papa.

How can you know what I am by sitting there and looking at me— How do you know I'm not a stenographer— How am I different from everybody else in town——

How did you know I went to Nashville—ask me why I went there, then. Say it; please, Papa, say it. Say anything, but don't sit there and look at me like that. I can't stand it another minute. Ask me, and I'll tell you the truth about everything.

I found a job in a barbershop in Nashville. It was even a cheaper place than the one in Birmingham, where the men came in and put their hands down the neck of my dress and squeezed me; it was the cheapest place I had ever heard about. After that I went to Memphis, and worked in a barbershop there a while. I was never a stenographer. I can't read a single line of shorthand. But I know all about manicuring, if I haven't forgotten it by this time.

After that I went to New Orleans. I wished to work in a fine place like the St. Charles. But they looked at me just like you are doing, and said they didn't need anyone else in the barbershop. They looked at me, just like Mama is looking at me now, but they didn't say anything about it. Nobody ever says anything about it, but everybody looks at me like that.

I had to take a job in a cheap barbershop in New Orleans. It was a cheaper place than the one in Memphis, or the one in Nashville. It was on Canal Street, and the men who came in did the same things the men in Birmingham and Nashville and Memphis had done. The men came in and put their hands down the neck of my dress and squeezed me until I screamed, and then they sat down and talked to me about things I had never heard of until I went to Birmingham to be a stenographer. The barbers talked to me, too, but nobody ever said anything about it. They knew it; but no one ever said it. I was soon making more money on the outside after hours than I was at the table. That's why I left and went to live in a cheap hotel. The room clerk looked at me like that, too, but he didn't say anything about it. Nobody ever does. Everyone looks at me like that, but there is never a word said about it.

The whole family knows everything I have done since I left home nearly five years ago to attend business college in Birmingham. They sit and look at me, talking about everything else they can think of, but they never ask me what I'm doing for a living. They never ask

me what company I work for in Birmingham, and they never ask me how I like stenography. They never mention it. Why don't you ask me about my boss— But you know I don't work for a company. You know everything about me, so why don't you say something to me about it——

If somebody would only say it, I could leave now and never have to come back again once a year at Christmas. I've been back once a year for four years now. You've known all about it for four years, so why don't you say something— Say it, and it will then be all over with.

Please ask me how I like my job in Birmingham, Mama. Mama, say, Are your hours too long, Agnes— have you a comfortable apartment—is your salary enough for you— Mama, say something to me. Ask me something; I'll not tell you a lie. I wish you would ask me something so I could tell you the truth. I've got to tell somebody, anybody. Don't sit there and look at me once a year at Christmas like that. Everyone knows I live in a cheap hotel in New Orleans, and that I'm not a stenographer. I'm not even a manicurist any longer. Ask me what I do for a living, Mama. Don't sit there and look at me once a year at Christmas like that and not say it.

Why is everyone afraid to say it— I'll not be angry; I'll not even cry. I'll be so glad to get it over with that I'll laugh. Please don't be afraid to say it; please stop

looking at me like that once a year at Christmas and go ahead and say it.

Elsie sits all day looking at me without ever asking me if she may come to visit me in Birmingham. Why don't you ask me, Elsie— I'll tell you 'why you can't. Go ahead and ask if you may visit me in Birmingham. I'll tell you why. Because if you went back with me you'd go to New Orleans and the men would come in and put their hands down the collar of your frock and squeeze you until you screamed. That's why you can't go back to Birmingham with me. But you do believe I live in Birmingham, don't you, Elsie— Ask me about the city, then. Ask me what street I live on. Ask me if my window in Birmingham faces the east or west, north or south. Say something, Elsie; isn't anyone ever going to ask me anything, or say something—

I'm not afraid; I'm a grown woman now. Talk to me as you would to anyone else my age. Just say one little something, and I'll have the chance to tell you. After that I'll leave and never come back again once a year at Christmas.

An hour ago Lewis came home and sat down in the parlor, but he didn't ask me a single question about myself. He didn't say anything. How does he know— Lewis, can you tell merely by looking at me, too— Is that how everyone knows— Please tell me what it is about me that everyone knows. And if everyone knows, why doesn't someone say something about it— If you

would only say it, Lewis, it would be all over with. I'd never have to come home again once a year at Christmas and be made to sit here and have everyone look at me like that but never saying anything about it.

Lewis sits there on the piano stool looking at me but not saying anything to me. How did you find it out, Lewis— Did someone tell you, or do you just know— I wish you would say something, Lewis, but if you are not going to say it, please, for God's sake, come over here and put your hand on me and squeeze until I scream. If you will only do that, it will be all over with. I'd never have to come back home once a year at Christmas and sit here like this.

Mama won't even ask me what my address is. She acts as though I went upstairs and slept a year, coming down once a year at Christmas. Mama, I've been away from home a whole year. Don't you care to ask me what I've been doing all that time— Go ahead and ask me, Mama. I'll tell you the truth. I'll tell you the perfect truth about myself.

Doesn't she care about writing to me—doesn't she care about my writing to her— Mama, don't you want my address so you can write to me and tell me how everyone is— Every time I leave they all stand around and look at me and never ask when I'm coming back again. Why don't they say it— If Mama would only say it, instead of looking at me like that, it would be better for all of us. I'd never have to come back home again, and they'd never have to sit all day and look at

me like that. Why don't you say something to me, Mama— For God's sake, Mama, don't sit there all day long and not say a word to me.

Mama hasn't even asked me if I am thinking of marrying. I heard her ask Elsie that this morning while I was in the bathroom. Elsie is six years younger than me, and Mama asks Elsie that but she has never asked me since I went to Birmingham five years ago to study shorthand. They don't even tell me about the people I used to know in town. They don't even say good-by when I leave.

If Papa will only say something about it, instead of looking at me like that all the time, I'll get out and stay out forever. I'll never come home again as long as I live, if he will only say it. Why doesn't he ask me if I can find a job for Lewis in Birmingham— Ask me to take him back to Birmingham and look after him to see that he gets along all right from the start, Papa. Ask me that, Papa. Please, Papa, ask me that; ask me something else then, and give me a chance to tell you. Please ask me that and stop sitting there looking at me like that. Don't you care if Lewis has a job— You don't want him to stay here and do nothing, do you— You don't want him to go downtown every night after supper and shoot craps until midnight, do you, Papa— Ask me if I can help Lewis find a job in Birmingham; ask me that, Papa.

I've got to tell somebody about myself. You know already, but I've got to tell you just the same. I've got

to tell you so I can leave home and never have to come back once a year at Christmas. I went to Birmingham and took the money to study manicuring. Then I found a job in a barbershop and sat all day long at a little table behind a screen in the rear. A man came in and put his hand down the neck of my dress and squeezed me until I screamed. I went to Nashville, to Memphis, to New Orleans. Every time I sat down at the manicurist's table in the rear of a barbershop, men came in and put their hands down my dress and squeezed me till I screamed.

If they would only say something it would be all over with. But they sit and look, and talk about something else all day long. That's the way it's been once a year at Christmas for four or five years. It's been that way ever since I took the money Papa gave me and went to Birmingham to study stenography at the business college. Papa knows I was a manicurist in a barbershop all the time I was there. Papa knows, but Papa won't say it. Say something, Papa. Please say something, so I can tell you what I do for a living. You know it already, and all the others, too; but I can't tell you until you say something about it. Mama, say something; Lewis, squeeze me till I scream. Somebody, anybody, say something.

For God's sake, say something about it this time so I won't have to come back again next year at Christmas and sit here all day in the parlor while you look at me. Everybody looks at me like that, but nobody ever says

it. Mama makes Elsie stay out of my room while I'm dressing, and Papa sends Lewis downtown every hour or two. If they would only say something, it would be all over with. But they sit all day long in the parlor, and look at me without saying it.

After every meal Mama takes the dishes I have used and scalds them at the sink. Why don't they say it, so I'll never have to come back——

Papa takes a cloth soaked in alcohol and wipes the chair I've been sitting in every time I get up and leave the room. Why don't you go ahead and say it——

Everyone sits in the parlor and looks at me all day long. Elsie and Lewis, Mama and Papa, they sit on the other side of the room and look at me all day long. Don't they know I'll tell them the truth if they would only ask me— Ask me, Papa; I'll tell you the truth, and never come back again. You can throw away your cloth soaked in alcohol after I've gone. So ask me. For God's sake, say something to me about it.

Once a year at Christmas they sit and look at me, but none of them ever says anything about it. They all sit in the parlor saying to themselves, We're looking at you, Agnes.

The People's Choice

GUS was leaning against the fount in the drug store Saturday morning when Ed Wright, one of the elders, came in and told Gus that the church had made him a deacon. Laying aside the election itself, that was the first of the blunders that were made between then and noon Sunday; Ed Wright should have had the sense not to notify Gus of the election until about midnight Saturday, or better still, until just before preaching-time Sunday morning. All the blame for what took place cannot be put off on Ed, though; Gus Streetman should be held just as responsible for what happened as anyone else in town, even if he did get drunker than usual.

After Ed had told Gus about the church election, Gus just stood there looking at Ed and at the boy behind the fount for several minutes. He was feeling so good about it, he didn't know what to say. He was as pleased about it as he ever was when he heard the county returns on election-night.

"You're a deacon now, Gus," Ed said, leaning against the fount and waiting for Gus to set him up. "Don't let the boys in the back seats slip any suspender buttons over on you."

"You know, Ed," he said, "I'd rather be elected dea-

con in the church than to get any other office in the county—except tax assessor. By George, it's a big thing to be a deacon in the church."

Gus was the county tax assessor. He had held the office against all opposition for the past ten or fifteen years, and, from the way things looked then, he would continue being the assessor as long as men went to the polls and saw Gus Streetman's name printed on the ballot.

"Well, Gus," Ed said, "everybody's glad about it, too. There wasn't any doubt about you being elected after your name was put up. It was unanimous, too."

Gus was feeling so good he didn't know what to say. He waited for Ed to tell him more about the election, when the minister and all the elders voted for him; but Ed was licking the corners of his mouth for a drink.

"Let's have a drink, Gus," he suggested.

"Oh, sure, sure!" Gus said, waking up. "What'll you have, Ed?"

"Make mine a lime-coke," he told the boy behind the fount.

"Give me another coke, son," Gus said, "with three big squirts of ammonia."

That was the fifth coke-and-ammonia Gus had drunk since eight-thirty that morning, and it was still two hours until noon.

He and Ed stood at the fount drinking their Coca Colas silently. Gus was busy thinking about his election as a deacon, and he was too busy thinking about it to

say anything. After a while, Ed said he had to hurry back to the hardware store to see if any customers had come in, and he left Gus leaning against the fount drinking his coke-and-ammonia.

"You'll have to help take up the collection tomorrow morning, Gus," Ed said at the door. "You'd better wear some shoes that don't squeak so much, because everybody will be looking at you."

"Oh, sure, sure," Gus said. "I'll be there all right. I'm a deacon now."

Gus was so busy thinking about his being a deacon in the church that he hardly knew what he was saying, or what Ed was talking about. He was busy thinking about celebrating in some way, too. He had never won an election yet that he hadn't celebrated, and he was just as proud of being a deacon as he was of being county tax assessor. He walked out of the drug store and started for the barbershop.

In the back room of the barbershop there was a little closet where he kept some of his corn and gin. He intended making the celebration this time as big as, or bigger than, any he had ever undertaken before. Usually, he had the chance to celebrate only each four years, when he was re-elected tax assessor, and this was an extra time, like an unexpected holiday.

People said that Gus Streetman was as big-hearted as a man can be, and that a man just couldn't help liking him. You could walk up to Gus on the street on a Saturday afternoon and ask Gus for anything you wished,

and Gus would give it to you if he had it or if he knew where he could lay his hands on it. You could ask Gus to lend you his new automobile to take a ride out to the country in, and Gus would slap his hand on your shoulder, just as if you were doing him a big favor, and say: "Oh, sure, sure! Go ahead and use it, Joe. Why, by George, all I've got in the world is yours for the asking. Sure, go ahead and drive it all you want, Joe."

After you had thanked Gus for the use of his new automobile, he would silence you and say: "Now, don't start talking like that, Joe. You make me think I ain't doing enough for you. Drive down to the filling station and fill her up with gas, and charge it to me. Just tell Dick I said to make out a ticket for whatever you want, and I'll come by and take it up the first of the week."

That's how Gus Streetman was about everything. It never mattered to him what a man wished. If you thought you would like to have something, all you had to do was to ask Gus, and if he had it, or knew where he could lay his hands on it, it was yours until you got good and ready to hand it back to him. Sometimes people took advantage of Gus, but not often. Nearly everyone knew where to draw the line, and he had so many friends to look out for him that he was taken care of. In the spring of that year Vance Young had stopped Gus one morning and said he was going up to Atlanta that week-end on a short business trip and that he would like to take Gus's wife along for company. Gus told him to go ahead and take her along, and he meant it, too;

but just before train-time somebody broke down and told Gus that Vance was only fooling, and it turned out to be a joke the barbershop crowd was playing on him.

That was one of the main reasons why Gus got re-elected tax assessor time after time. He had been tax assessor for about fifteen years already, and no man who had ever tried to run against Gus in the primaries had a dog's chance of taking the office away from him. Just before a primary, Gus would load his automobile up with three or four dozen of those big Senator Watson watermelons, and start out electioneering. He would come to a house beside the road, stop, and get out carrying two of those big melons under his arms. When he reached the front porch, he would roll the Senator Watsons up to the door and take out his pearl-handled pocketknife and rap on the boards until somebody came out.

"Well, how's everything, Harry?" Gus would say, thumping the Senator Watsons with his knuckles, and cocking his head sideways to hear the *thump! thump!* "How are you satisfied with your tax assessment, Harry?"

Nobody was ever satisfied, of course, and that was all there would be to Gus getting another vote for the primary. Being a Democrat, he never had to worry about the Republicans at election time. The lily-whites never bothered with county politics; the mail carriers knew perfectly well which side their bread was buttered on.

"Reckon we can get the assessment changed, Gus?" the man would say.

Gus would never answer that question, because by that time he was always busy splitting open one of those big Senator Watsons. When he had got the heart cut out, and had passed it around, he would wipe the blade of his pearl-handled knife on his pants-leg and shake hands all around.

"We need a little rain, don't we?" Gus would say, starting back to the road where his car was. "Maybe we'll get a shower before sundown."

That's how Gus got elected county tax assessor the first time, and that's how he was re-elected every four years following. He never made any promises; therefore he never violated any. But he got the votes, nearly all there were in the whole county.

When Gus had first started out to be elected deacon, he went about his campaign the same way he did when he was running for political office. He filled up the minister on those big Senator Watsons, day after day, and all the elders, too. When the church election was held during the last week in July, Gus's name was the first one put up for deacon, and there was only one ballot taken. Gus got all the votes.

But when Gus wasn't canvassing for votes, political or otherwise, and when he wasn't out in some part of the county assessing property, he was usually drinking corn and gin. He kept a store of it in the back room of the barbershop, another supply in the garage at home where

his wife wouldn't be likely to find it, and a third one at the courthouse, in the coal box in his office, where he could reach it at any time of the day or night.

Gus never got too drunk to walk; that is to say, Fred Jones, the marshal, never had to lock him up. Gus was always on his feet, no matter how much he had been drinking, or for how long a time. He could hold his corn and gin with never an outward sign of drunkenness, unless you happened to look him in his eyes, or to measure his stride.

That Saturday morning, though, after Ed Wright had notified him of the election, Gus went down to the barbershop and cleaned out all his liquor there, and then he walked over to the courthouse and started on the bottles he kept in the coal box in his office on the second floor.

Nobody saw much of him again that day, until at a little after eight o'clock that night when he came out of the courthouse and walked across the square for another coke-and-ammonia at the fount in the drug store. Even then nobody paid much attention to Gus, because he was walking in fairly even strides, and he wasn't talking unduly loud for a Saturday night. The marshal watched Gus for a few minutes, and then left the square and went back down the alley to pick up a few more drunks for the lock-up in front of the Negro fish houses.

There had been a traveling carnival in town all that week, and nearly everyone went to the show grounds that night to see the carnival close up and move off to

the next town. Gus started out there with two or three of his friends at about ten-thirty or eleven. All of them were well liquored, and Gus was shining. When they got to the show grounds, Gus started out to wind up his celebration. He let loose that Saturday night. He took in all the side shows, and he had a big crowd of men and boys following him around the grounds, whooping it up with him.

Just before midnight, when the carnival was getting ready to close and move on to the next town down the road, Gus saw a show he had missed. It was a little tent off to itself, with a big red-painted picture of a girl, pretty much naked, dancing on it. There was no name on the show, as there were on the others, but down in one corner of the big red picture, just under the girl's feet, was a little sign that said: *For Men Only*.

As soon as somebody told Gus it was a hoochie-coochie show, he dashed for it, pushing people out of his way right and left. He ran up to the ticket seller, bought three or four dozen tickets, and waved his arms at everybody who wished to go in with him and see the show. After they had crowded inside, the show went to pieces so quickly that no one knew what had happened.

Nobody yet tells exactly what Gus said or did when he got inside with the hoochie-coochie girl, but whatever it was, the show was a complete wreck inside of two minutes. It might have been Gus who jerked out the center pole, bringing the tent down on top of everybody, and it might not have been Gus who grabbed the

girl around her waist and made her yell as though she were being squeezed to death by a maniac. But anyway, the tent came down; the dancer yelled and screamed, first for help, next for mercy; the ticket seller shouted for the stake-drivers; and some fool down under the tent struck a match to the canvas. When the crowd got the blazing tent off the girl and the bunch of men, they found her and Gus down on the bottom of the pile struggling with each other. Fred Jones, the marshal, came running up just then all excited, deputizing citizens right and left, and got everybody herded out of the show grounds and closed up the carnival.

What happened to Gus after that, nobody knows exactly, because some of his friends pried him loose from the little dark-skinned hoochie-coochie dancer, and carried him away in an automobile to cool off. Later that night they brought him back to town and locked him in the barbershop so he couldn't get out where the marshal was certain to get him if he showed himself on the street again that night.

Gus didn't go home to his wife that night, because he was in the back room of the barbershop pulling on two or three new bottles at three o'clock when the rest of the crowd decided it was time to call it a night and to go home and get some sleep. They locked Gus in the back room to sleep it off.

Early the next morning, Clyde Young, the barber, went down and shaved Gus and patched up his clothes a little; and at about eleven-fifty, ten or fifteen minutes

before the sermon at the church was due to end, Gus walked in and sat down in a rear pew.

Gus was supposed to be there, all right, because he was a deacon then, and it was his duty to help take up the morning offering. But Gus was not supposed to be there in the shape he was in, all liquored up again fresh that morning in the barbershop. Clyde Young had brought Gus an eye-opener when he went down to shave him and to get him ready to take up collection at the church.

Nobody paid much attention to Gus when he walked into the church and took a seat in the back. The minister saw Gus, and likewise a dozen or more of the congregation who turned around to see who was coming to church so late. But nobody knew the condition Gus was in. He did not show it any more than he ever did. He looked to be as sober as the minister himself.

Gus sat still and quiet in the back of the church until the sermon was over. It was then time to take up the morning offering. It was customary for the deacons to walk down to the front of the pulpit, pick up the collection baskets, take up the money, and then to march back down the aisles while one of the women in the choir sang a solo.

Gus went down and got his basket all right, and took up all the money on his side of the aisle without missing a dime. Then, when all the deacons had got to the rear of the church, they began marching in step, slowly, down the aisles towards the pulpit where the

minister was waiting to say a prayer over the money and to pronounce the benediction. The girl singing the solo was supposed to time herself so she would get to the end of the piece just as the deacons laid the collection baskets on the table in front of the pulpit.

Everything worked smoothly enough, until just about the time that the rest of the deacons got about halfway down the aisles on their way back to the pulpit. The soloist was standing up in the choir singing her piece, the organist was playing the accompaniment, when Gus stopped dead in his tracks, playing havoc with all the ritual.

The elders and the minister should have had better sense than to have made Gus Streetman a deacon, to begin with; but Gus had carried them off their feet, just as he did the voters when he was canvassing for reelection for county tax assessor. It wasn't Gus's fault any more than it was the fault of the people who made him a deacon; they were the ones upon whom most of the blame should be put. And on the other hand, even if he was to be a deacon, somebody connected with the church should have hunted up Gus that morning before preaching started and made sure that he was in condition to enter a house of worship. But things were never done that way in Georgia. People liked Gus, and they let him do as he pleased.

When Gus came stomping down the aisle that morning, rattling the collection basket as though he were warming up a crap game, he was as drunk as a horse-

trader on court-day. But it was the people's fault; they should never have made Gus a deacon to begin with, unless some arrangement to keep him sober on Sunday was agreed upon.

Gus was standing there in the aisle by himself. The other deacons had marched down to the table in front of the pulpit, glancing back over their shoulders to see what the matter was with Gus, but scared to go back and get him. They didn't know what he might say or do if they tried to make him follow them.

By that time, the church was rank with the smell of Gus's liquor, and all the people were sniffing the air, and turning around in their pews to look at him. Gus was staring at the girl singing the solo in the choir, and shaking the dimes and quarters in the collection basket as if it had been a kitty-pot in a Saturday night crap game in the barbershop.

Then, suddenly, Gus shouted. He must have been heard all the way across town in the Baptist church, disrupting their service, too.

"Shake it up!" Gus yelled at the girl singing the solo.

The church was buzzing like a beehive in no time. The congregation was standing up, sniffing Gus's whisky-smell; the organist stopped playing the accompaniment for the solo, the girl stopped singing, and everybody, including the minister, was staring open-mouthed at Gus Streetman. During all that time, Gus was standing there in the aisle rattling the money and looking at the soloist. It was a strange thing to happen, but she

did look a lot like the hoochie-coochie dancer with the carnival.

When everybody was hoping that the worst was over, Gus shouted again.

"Shake it up!" he yelled at the girl. "Shake it un, Baby!"

Nearly everyone in the church knew what Gus was talking about, because most of the men had been to the show grounds the week before, and either had seen, or had been told about the little brown-skinned hoochie-coochie dancer in the tent for men only, and all the women, of course, had heard about her.

Gus was getting ready to yell again, and maybe do something shocking, but before he could do it, a bunch of the elders and deacons jumped on him and hustled him out of the church in a hurry.

The minister pronounced a hurried and short benediction, and ran out the back door and around to the street to see what was happening to Gus in front of the church.

The elders and deacons hustled Gus into an automobile and drove off with him at fifty miles an hour. The minister and the rest of the congregation came running down the street behind the car.

When they reached the jail, nearly everybody in town was down there by that time to see Gus Streetman get locked up. The Baptist church had turned out, and all the Baptists were there on their way home to see what was taking place. There was a delay of ten or fifteen minutes while somebody was going for Fred Jones, the

marshal; Fred wasn't a member of any church, and he was always at home Sunday morning reading the *Sunday Journal* and *The Atlanta American*. The marshal had the only key to the jail there was, and Gus couldn't be put inside until he came and unlocked the doors.

While everybody was standing around looking and talking, Gus climbed up on the radiator of an automobile and held out his hands for silence. People standing off at a distance pushed closer, saying, "Shhh!" in order to hear what Gus was about to say.

"Citizens of Washington County," Gus shouted, waving his hands and looking the crowd over just as he did when he took the stump for the county primary. "Citizens of Washington County, I'm not here today to ask you if you are satisfied with your tax assessments; I'm not here today, folks, to ask if you believe there is a better man in the county than Gus Streetman—citizens of Washington County, I'm here today, folks, to ask if you think there's another man in the entire county who can increase the membership and attendance and double the collection in a church like the man you are now facing!"

The marshal came running up just then and opened the doors of the lock-up. He walked over to the car and jerked Gus down from the radiator and hustled him inside the little brick building. The crowd pressed around the lock-up, trying to see what Gus looked like on the inside. A lot of the ones who were not engaged in pushing and shoving and elbowing towards the windows

were shouting: "Hooray for Gus! Hooray for Gus! Hooray for Gus Streetman!"

While the crowd was milling around the windows of the lock-up, Gus's face suddenly appeared behind the bars of one of them. He shouted for attention and raised his hands for silence just as if he were canvassing the county for the Democratic White Primary.

"Go home and think it over, folks!" he yelled, "and when election day comes around, bring out the family and let's pile up a landslide for Gus Streetman!"

Somebody in the crowd shouted: "Hooray for Gus!"

Gus held up his hands again, silencing the crowd outside the windows.

"Vote for Gus Streetman, folks!" he yelled. "Everybody votes for Gus Streetman! Gus Streetman for deacon!"

Just then the marshal came up behind Gus and hustled him away from the window and pushed him into one of the lock-up cages. After that there was nothing to stay for any longer, because Gus was locked out of sight, and the crowd turned away and started home for Sunday dinner. Everybody was hoping, though, that Gus would get bailed out of the lock-up in time to take up the collection again the following week, the second Sunday in August.

Indian Summer

THE water was up again. It had been raining for almost two whole days, and the creek was full to the banks. Dawn had broken gray that morning, and for the first time that week the sky was blue and warm.

Les pulled off his shirt and unbuckled his pants. Les never had to bother with underwear, because as soon as it was warm enough in the spring to go barefooted he hid his union suit in a closet and left it there until fall. His mother was not alive, and his father never bothered about the underclothes.

"I wish we had a shovel to dig out some of the muck," he said. "Every time it rains this hole fills up with this stuff. I'd go home and get a shovel, but if they saw me they'd make me stay there and do something."

While Les was hanging his shirt and pants on a bush, I waded out into the yellow water. The muck on the bottom was ankle deep, and there were hundreds of dead limbs stuck in it. I pulled out some of the largest and threw them on the other bank out of the way.

"How's the water, Jack?" Les asked. "How deep is it this time?"

I waded out to the middle of the creek where the current was the strongest. The yellow water came almost up to my shoulders.

"Nearly neck deep," I said. "But there's about a million dead limbs stuck in the bottom. Hurry up and help me throw them out."

Les came splashing in. The muddy water gurgled and sucked around his waist.

"I'll bet somebody comes down here every day and pitches these dead limbs in here," Les said, making a face. "I don't see how else they could get here. Dead tree limbs don't fall into a creek this fast. Somebody is throwing them in, and I'll bet a pretty he doesn't live a million miles away, either."

"Maybe Old Howes does it, Les."

"Sure, he does it. He's the one I'm talking about. I'll bet anything he comes down and throws limbs in every day."

Les stepped on a sharp limb. He held his nose and squeezed his eyes and ducked under and pulled it out.

"You know what?" Les said.

"What?"

"Old Howes told Pa we scared his cows last Saturday. He said we made them run so much he couldn't get them to let 'down their milk Saturday night."

"This creek bottom isn't his. Old Howes doesn't own anything down here except that pasture on the other side of the fence. We haven't even been on the other side of the fence this year, have we?"

"I haven't seen Old Howes' cows all summer. If I should see them, I wouldn't run them. He just told Pa

that because he doesn't want us to come swimming in the creek."

Pieces of dead bark and curled chips suddenly came floating down the creek. Somewhere up there the trash had broken loose from a limb or something across the water. I held my arms V-shaped and caught the bark and chips and threw them out of the way.

Les said something, diving down to pull up a dead limb. The muck on the bottom of the creek was so deep we could not take a step without first pulling our feet out of the sticky mud; otherwise we would have fallen flat on our faces in the water. The muck had a stink like a pig pen.

Les threw the big limb out of sight.

"If Old Howes ever comes down while we're here and tells us to get out of the creek, let's throw muck at him. Are you game, Jack? Wouldn't you like to do that to him just once?"

"That's what we ought to do to him, but we'd better not, Les. He would go straight and tell my folks, and your Pa."

"I'm not scared of Old Howes," Les said, making a face. "He hasn't got me buffaloeed. He wouldn't do anything. He's scared to tell anybody. He knows we'd catch him some time and mud-cake him."

"I don't know," I said. "He told on me that time I caught his drake and put it in that chicken run of his."

"That was a long time—" Les stopped and listened

Somebody had stepped on a dead limb behind the bushes. The crack of the wood was loud enough to be heard above the splashing and gurgling in the creek.

"What's that?" both of us said.

"Who's that?" Les asked me.

"Listen!" I said. "Duck down and be quiet."

Behind the bushes we could hear someone walking on dead twigs and dry leaves. Both of us squatted down in the water until only our heads were above it.

"Who is it?" Les whispered to me.

I shook my head, holding my nose under the water.

The yellow water swirled and gurgled through the tree roots beside us. The roots had been washed free of earth by the high waters many years before, and now they were old-looking and covered with bark.

Les squatted lower and lower until only his eyes and the top of his head were showing. He held his nose under the water with both hands. The water was high, and its swiftness and muddy-heaviness made gurgling sounds that echoed up and down the creek.

Suddenly the bushes parted, and Jenny came through. When Les saw her, his eyes popped open and he jerked his head above the water to get his breath. The noise he made when the water bubbled scared all three of us for a moment.

Jenny was Old Howes' daughter. She was about our age, possibly a year or two older.

Les saw her looking at our clothes hanging on the bushes. He nudged me with his elbow.

"What are you doing down here?" Les said gruffly, trying to scare her.

"Can't I come if I wish to?"

"You can't come down here when we're in swimming. You're not a boy."

"I can come if I wish to, smarty," Jenny said. "~~This~~ creek doesn't belong to you."

"It doesn't belong to you, either," Les said, making a face. "What are you going to do about that?"

"All right," Jenny said, "if you wish to be so mean about it, Leslie Blake, I'll take your clothes and hide them where you'll never find them again as long as you live. What are you going to do about that?"

Jenny reached for the clothes. She grabbed Les's pants and my shirt and union suit.

Les caught my arm and pulled me towards the bank. We couldn't hurry at first, because we had to jerk our feet out of the muck before we could move at all.

"Let's duck her, Jack," Les whispered. "Let's give her a good ducking. Come on."

We crawled up the bank and caught Jenny just as she was starting to run through the bushes with our clothes. Les locked his arms around her waist and I caught her arms and pulled as hard as I could.

"I'll scream!" Jenny said. "If you don't stop, I'll scream at the top of my lungs. Papa is in the pasture, and he'll come right away. You know what he'll do to both of you, don't you?"

"We're not afraid of anybody," Les said, scowling and trying to scare her.

I put my hand over her mouth and held her with one arm locked around her neck. Together we pulled and dragged her back to the bank beside the creek.

"Don't you want to duck her, Jack?" Les said. "Don't you think we ought to? She's been telling Old Howes tales about us. She's a tattle-tale tit."

"We ought to duck her, all right," I said. "But suppose she goes and tells on us about that?"

"When we get through ducking her, she won't tell any more tales on us. We'll duck her until she promises and crosses her heart never to tell anybody. She's the one who's been throwing dead limbs into the creek every day. I'll bet anything she's the one who's been doing it."

Jenny was helpless while we held her. Les had her around the waist with both arms, and I still held her neck locked in the crook of my left arm. She tried to bite my hand over her mouth, but every time she tried to hurt me, I squeezed her neck so hard she had to stop.

I was a little afraid to duck Jenny, because once we had ducked a colored boy named Bisco, and it had almost drowned him. We ducked Bisco so many times he couldn't breathe, and he became limp all over. We had to stretch him out on the ground and roll him over and over, and all the time we were doing that, yellow creek water was running out of his mouth. I was afraid we might drown Jenny. I didn't know what would happen to us if we did that.

"I know what let's do to her, Les," I said.

"What?"

"Let's mud-cake her."

"What's the matter with ducking her? It will scare her and make her stop throwing dead limbs into the creek. It'll stop her from telling tales about us, too."

"We'd better not duck her, Les," I said. "Remember the time we ducked Bisco? We nearly drowned him. I don't want anything like that to happen again."

Les thought a while, looking at Jenny's back. She was kicking and scratching all the time, but she couldn't begin to hurt us, and we had her so she couldn't get loose.

"All right," Les said. "We'll mud-cake her then. That's just as good as ducking, and it'll teach her a lesson. It'll make her stop being a tattle-tale tit."

"She's going to tell on us anyway, so we'd better do a good job of it this time. But it ought to make her stop throwing dead limbs into the swimming hole, anyway."

"She won't tell on us after we get through with her," Les said. "She won't tell anybody. She won't even tell Old Howes. Ducking and mud-caking always stops kids from telling tales. It's the only way to cure it."

"All right," I said, "let's do it to her. She needs ducking, or mud-caking, or something. Somebody has got to do it to her, and we're the right ones to make a good job of it. I'll bet she won't bother us again after we get through with her."

Les threw Jenny on the ground beside the bank, locking her arms behind her back and holding her face in the earth so she couldn't make any noise. Les had to straddle her neck to keep her still.

"Take off her clothes, Jack," Les said. "I've got her. She can't get away as long as I'm holding her."

I reached down to pull off her dress, and she kicked me full in the stomach with both feet. When I fell backward and tried to sit up, there was no breath left in me. I opened my mouth and tried to yell at Les, but I couldn't even whisper.

"What's the matter, Jack?" Les said, turning his head and looking at me.

I got up on both knees and doubled over, holding my stomach with both arms.

"What's the matter with you, Jack?" he said. "Did she kick you?"

Les's back had been turned and he had not seen what Jenny had done to me.

"Did she kick me!" I said weakly. "It must have been her, but it felt like a mule. She knocked all of the wind out of me."

"Sit on her legs, then," Les said. "She can't kick you if you do that."

I ran down to the side of the creek and came back with a double handful of yellow muck. When I had dug it out of the creek, it had made a sucking sound, and the odor was worse than any that ever came out of a pig pen. The muck in the creek stank worse than any-

thing I had ever smelled. It was nothing but rotted leaves and mud, but it smelled like decayed eggs and a lot of other things.

I got Jenny's dress off and tossed it on the bushes so it would not get covered with muck. Les was able to hold her arms and cover her mouth at the same time by then, because she was not nearly so strong as either of us.

"She's got underwear on, Les," I said.

"Sure she has," Les said. "All girls wear underclothes. That's what makes them so sissy."

"You're not talking about me, are you?" I said, looking at him. "Because if you are——"

"I'm talking about her," Les said. "I know you have to wear the stuff because your people make you do it. But girls like to have it on. They don't want to go without it. That's why girls are so sissy."

"All right," I said, "but don't try to get nasty with me, because I'll——"

"You won't do anything, so shut up. Hurry and take her clothes off."

"Are we going to strip her naked?" I said.

"Sure," Les said. "We've got to. We can't mud-cake her if we don't strip her, can we?"

"I know that," I said, "but suppose Old Howes came down and saw us——"

"Old Howes wouldn't do anything but spit and slip up in it. Who's scared of him, anyway? I'm not."

After we had struggled with Jenny a while longer,

and after her underclothes were finally off, Les said he was tired of holding her. He was puffing and blowing as if he had been running five miles without stopping to rest.

I took Jenny's arms and put my hand over her mouth and sat on her neck. Les picked up a big handful of muck and threw it at her. The muck struck her on the stomach, making a sound like slapping water with a plank. He threw another handful. It splattered all over us.

While Les was running to the creek for another load, I turned Jenny over so he could smear some on her back. She did not struggle any more now, but I was afraid to release my grip on her arms or to take my hand off her mouth. When I had turned her over, she lay motionless on the ground, not even kicking her feet any more.

"This'll fix her," Les said, coming back with his hands and arms full of yellow muck. "She's had it coming to her for a long time. Maybe it'll stop her from being a tattle-tale tit."

He dropped the mass on her back and ran back for some more.

"Rub that in while I'm getting another load, Jack," he said. "That's what she needs to make her stop throwing dead limbs into the creek. She won't tell any more tales about us, either."

I reached over and with one hand smeared the muck up and down Jenny's back, on her legs, and over her

arms and shoulders. I tried not to get any of it in her hair, because I knew how hard it was to try to wash it out with yellow creek water.

"Turn her over," Les said, dropping down beside us with a new load of muck. "We're just getting started on her."

I turned Jenny over again, and she did not even try to get loose from me. Les had begun to spread the muck over her, rubbing it into her skin. He took a handful and smeared it over her legs and thighs and stomach. Then he took another handful and rubbed it over her shoulders and breasts. Jenny still did not attempt to move, though she squirmed a little when Les rubbed the most tender parts of her body with the mass of rotted leaves and mud. Most of the time she lay as still as if she had been sound asleep.

"That's funny," I said.

"What's funny?" Les asked, looking up.

"She's not even trying to get loose now."

"That's because she's foxy," Les said. "She's just waiting for a good chance to break away. Here, let me hold her a while."

Les took my place and I picked up a handful of muck and began spreading it over her. The muck was not sticky any longer, and when I smeared it on her, it felt slick and smooth. When my hands moved over her, I could feel that her body was much softer than mine, and that parts of her were very soft. When I smeared the slick mud over her breasts, it felt so smooth

and soft that I was afraid to touch her there again. I glanced at her face, and I saw her looking down at me. From the way she looked at me, I could not help thinking that she was not angry with us for treating her like that. I even thought that perhaps if Les had not been there she would have let me mud-cake her as long as I wished to. Unknowingly my hands had reached for her breasts again, and suddenly I knew that we were doing a mean thing to her.

"What are you doing, Jack?" Les said. "That's a funny way to spread muck on her."

"We've got enough on her, Les. Let's not put any more on her. Let's let her go home now. She's had enough."

"What's the matter with you?" Les said, scowling. "We're not half finished with her yet. We've got to put another coat of muck on her."

Jenny looked up when Les said that, and her eyes opened wider. She did not have to speak to tell me what she wished to say.

"That's enough, Les," I said. "She's a girl. That's enough for a girl."

I don't know, but somehow I believed that Les felt the same way I did, only he did not wish to admit it. Now that we had stripped her and had smeared her all over with muck, neither of us could forget that Jenny was a girl. We had treated her as though she were a boy, but she remained a girl still.

"If we let you up now, will you promise not to yell?" Les asked her.

Jenny nodded her head, and Les dropped his hand from her mouth.

We both expected to hear her say what she was going to do, and what she was going to tell, because of the way we had treated her; but the moment she was freed she sat up quickly and tried to cover herself with her arms, without once speaking.

As soon as we saw that she was not going to call for Old Howes, Les and I ran to the creek and dived head-on into it. We squatted down until only our heads were showing above the water and began scrubbing the muck off us. Jenny looked at us, covering herself as much as she could.

She still had not said anything to us.

"Let's get dressed and run for home," Les said. "Pa would tear me up if he caught me down here now, with her like that."

Jenny covered her eyes while we dashed out of the water and grabbed our clothes. We ran behind the bushes to dress. While we were standing there, we could hear Jenny splashing in the creek, scrubbing the muck from her.

Les had only his shirt and pants to put on, and he was ready to go before I could even straighten out my union suit. He buckled his pants and started backing off with his shirt tail hanging out while he tried to find

the right buttons for the buttonholes. I had been in such a hurry to jump into the creek when we first came that I had tangled my union suit, and when I would get the arms straight, the legs would be wrong side out. Les kept backing farther and farther away from me.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Why don't you hurry?"

"I can't get this union suit untangled."

"That's what you get for wearing underclothes in summer."

"I can't help it," I said, "and you know it."

"Well, it isn't my fault, is it?"

"Aren't you going to wait for me?"

"I can't, Jack," he said, backing away faster. He suddenly turned around and began running. "I've got to go home."

"I thought you said you weren't scared of Old Howes, or of anybody else!" I yelled after him, but if he heard me, he pretended not to understand what I had said.

After Les had gone, I took my time. There was no need to hurry, because I was certain that no matter what time I got home; Jenny would tell Old Howes what we had done to her, and he would come and tell my folks all about it. I wished to have plenty of time to think of what I was going to say when I had to face everybody and tell the truth.

Jenny had left the creek by the time I was ready to button my shirt, and she had only to slip her underclothes over her head and to put on her dress to be

ready to go home. She came through the bushes while I was still fumbling with my shirt buttons.

"What's the matter, Jack?" she asked, smiling just a little. "Why didn't you run off with Leslie?"

"I couldn't get dressed any quicker," I said.

I was about to tell her how my union suit was so tangled that I had had to spend most of the time struggling with that, but I thought better of saying it.

She came several steps closer, and I started to run from her.

"Where are you going?" she said. "What are you running for?"

I stopped, turned around, and looked at Jenny. Now that she was dressed, she looked the same as she had always looked. She was the same in appearance, but somehow I knew that she was not the same, after what had happened beside the creek. I could not forget the sensation I had felt when my hands, slick with mud, had touched the softness of her body. As I looked at her, I believed I felt it again, because I knew that without the dress and the underclothes she would always remain the same as she was when I had first touched her.

"Why don't you wait for me, Jack?" she said.

I wished to run away from her, and I wished to run to her. I stood still while she came closer.

"But you're going to tell, aren't you? Aren't you going to tell what we did to you?"

She had come to where I stood, and I turned and walked beside her, several feet away. We went through

the bushes and out through the woods to the road. There was no one in sight, and we walked together until we reached her house.

Just before we got to the gate I felt my hand touch hers. I don't know, but somehow, whether it was true or not, I believed she had taken my hand and held it in hers for a moment. When I suddenly looked to see, because I wished to be certain that she had taken my hand and squeezed it, she turned the other way and went through the gate.

I waited in the middle of the road until she walked up the front steps and crossed the porch. She stopped there a moment and brushed her dress with her hands, as if she wished to be sure that there was no muck clinging to it. When she opened the door and went inside, I was not certain whether she had glanced at me over her shoulder, or whether I merely imagined she had. Anyway, I believed she had, because I felt her looking at me, just as I was sure that she had held my hand for a moment.

"Jenny won't tell," I said, running up the road towards home. "Jenny won't tell," I kept saying over and over again all the way there.

Rachel

EVERY evening she came down through the darkness of the alley, emerging in the bright light of the street like the sudden appearance of a frightened child far from home. I knew that she had never reached the end of the alley before eight o'clock, and yet there were evenings when I ran there two hours early and waited beside the large green and red hydrant until she came. During all those months I had known her, she had been late only two or three times, and then it was only ten or fifteen minutes past eight when she came.

Rachel had never told me where she lived, and she would never let me walk home with her. Where the alley began, at the hydrant, was the door through which she came at eight, and the door which closed behind her at ten. When I had begged her to let me walk with her, she always pleaded with me, saying that her father did not allow her to be with boys and that if he should see us together he would either beat her unmercifully or make her leave home. For that reason I kept the promise I had given her, and I never went any farther than the entrance to the alley with her.

"I'll always come down to see you in the evening,

Frank," she said; and added hastily, "as long as you wish me to come. But you must remember your promise never to try to find where I live, nor to walk home with me."

I promised again and again.

"Perhaps some day you can come to see me," she whispered, touching my arm, "but not now. You must never go beyond the hydrant until I tell you that you may."

Rachel had told me that almost every time I saw her, as if she wished to impress upon me the realization of some sort of danger that lay in the darkness of the alley. I knew there was no physical danger, because around the corner was our house and I was as familiar with the neighborhood as anyone else. And besides, during the day I usually walked through the alley to our back gate on my way home, because it was a short cut when I was late for supper. But after dark the alley was Rachel's, and I had never gone home that way at night for fear of what I might have seen or heard of her. I had promised her from the beginning that I would never follow her to find out where she lived, and that I would never attempt to discover her real name. The promise I had made was kept until the end.

I knew Rachel and her family were poor, because she had been wearing the same dress for nearly a year. It was a worn and fragile thing of faded blue cotton. I had never seen it soiled, and I knew she washed it

every day. It had been mended time after time, carefully and neatly, and each evening when I saw her, I was worried because I knew that the weave of the cloth would not stand much more wear. I was constantly afraid that almost any day the dress would fall into shreds, and I dreaded for that time ever to come. I wished to offer to buy her a dress with the few dollars I had saved in my bank, but I was afraid to even suggest such a thing to her. I knew she would not have allowed me to give her the money, and I did not know what we would do when the dress became completely worn out. I was certain that it would mean the end of my seeing her. It was only the constant attention that she gave it and the care with which she laundered it each day that could have kept the dress whole as long as it had been.

Once Rachel had worn a pair of black silk stockings. From the first she had come each night to the brightly lighted street in her white cotton stockings, and for a year she had worn no other kind. Then one evening she had on a pair of black silk ones.

The next evening I expected to see her wearing them again, but when she came out of the alley, she was wearing the stockings of white cotton. I did not ask her about it, because I had learned never to say anything that might hurt her feelings, but I was never able to understand why she wore black silk stockings just that one time. She may have borrowed them from her mother or sister, and there were dozens of other ways

she could have got them, and yet none of the reasons I could think of ever seemed entirely conclusive. If I had asked her, perhaps she would have laughed, touched my arm as she did when we were together, and told me. But I was afraid to ask her. There were so many ways of making her feel badly, and of hurting her.

Each evening when she came out of the black alley I met her there, and together we walked down the brightly lighted street to the corner where there was a drug store. On the opposite corner there was a moving picture theater. To one or the other we went each evening. I should have liked to have taken her to both the show and to the drug store, but I was never able to earn enough money for both in the same evening. The twenty cents I received every day for delivering the afternoon paper on a house-to-house route was not enough to buy ice cream at the drug store and seats at the picture show, too. We had to take our choice between them.

When we stood on the corner across from the drug store and across from the theater, we could never decide at first whether to see the show or to eat ice cream. The good times we had there on the corner were just as enjoyable, to me, as anything else we did. Rachel would always try to make me tell her which I would rather do before she would commit herself. And of course I wished to do that which would please her the most.

"I'm not going a step in either direction until you

tell me which you would rather do," I would say to her. "It doesn't matter to me, because being with you is everything I wish for."

"I'll tell you what let's do, Frank," she said, touching my arm, and pretending not to be serious; "you go to the drug store, and I'll go to the movies."

That was Rachel's way of telling me which she preferred, although I didn't believe she ever suspected that I knew. But when she suggested that I go to the movies while she went to the drug store, I knew it to mean that she would much rather have a dish of ice cream that evening. The enjoyment of the show lasted for nearly two hours, while the ice cream could never be prolonged for more than half an hour, so all but two or three evenings a week we went to the theater across the street.

There was where I always wished to go, because in the semi-darkness we sat close together and I held her hand. And if the house was not filled, we always found two seats near the rear, in one of the two corners, and there I kissed her when we were sure no one was looking at us.

After the show was over, we went out into the bright street and walked slowly towards the green and red hydrant in the middle of the block. There at the entrance to the alley we stopped a while. If there were no other people in the street, I always put my arm around Rachel's waist while we walked slowly to the dark entrance. Neither of us spoke then, but I held

her tighter to me, and she squeezed my fingers. When at last, after delaying as long as possible the time for her to go, we walked together a few steps into the darkness of the alley and stood in each other's arms, Rachel kissed me for the first time during the evening, and I kissed her for as long a time as I had wished to in the theater. Still not speaking, we drew apart, our fingers interwoven and warm.

When she was about to disappear into the darkness of the alley, I ran to her and caught her hands in mine.

"I love you, Rachel," I told her, squeezing her fingers tighter and tighter as she withdrew them.

"And I love you, too, Frank," she said, turning and running into the alley out of sight for another day.

After waiting a while and listening until she had gone beyond hearing distance, I turned and walked slowly up the street towards home. Our house was only a block away: half a block to the corner, and another half-block from there. When I had reached my room, I went to the window and stood there looking out into the night and listening for some sound of her. My window faced the alley behind the house, and the street lights cast a dim glow over the house-tops, but I could never see down into the darkness of the alley. After waiting at the window for an hour or more I undressed and went to bed. Many times I thought I heard the sound of her voice somewhere in the darkness, but after I had sprung from bed and had listened intently at the

window for a long time I knew it was some other sound I had heard.

Near the end of summer I received a five-dollar gold piece as a birthday present from an aunt. As soon as I saw it, I began making plans for Rachel and me. I wished to surprise her that evening with the money, and then to take her downtown on a street car. First we would go to a restaurant, and afterward to one of the large theaters. We had never been downtown together, and it was the first time I had ever had more than fifty cents at one time. That afternoon as soon as I could deliver all the papers on my route, I ran home and began making all over again the plans I had for the evening.

Just before dark I went downstairs from my room to wait on the front porch for the time to come when I could meet Rachel. I sat on the porch steps, not even remembering to tell my mother that I was going downtown. She had never allowed me to go that far away from the house without first telling her where I was going, with whom, and at what time I would come back.

I had been sitting on the porch steps for nearly an hour when my older sister came to the door and called me.

"We have a job for you, Frank," Nancy said. "Mother would like for you to come to the kitchen before you leave the house. Now, don't forget and go away."

I told her I would come right away. I was thinking then how much the surprise would mean to Rachel, and I did forget about the job waiting for me in the kitchen for nearly half an hour. It was then almost time for me to meet Rachel at the hydrant, and I jumped up and ran to the kitchen to finish the task as quickly as I could.

When I reached the kitchen, Nancy handed me a small round box and told me to open it and sprinkle the powder in the garbage can. I had heard my mother talking about the way rats were getting into the garbage, so I went down to the back gate with the box without stopping to talk about it. As soon as I had sprinkled the powder on the refuse, I ran back into the house, found my cap, and ran down the street. I was angry with my sister for causing me to be late in meeting Rachel, even though the fault was my own for not having done the task sooner. I was certain, though, that Rachel would wait for me, even if I was a few minutes late in getting to the hydrant. I could not believe that she would come to the hydrant and leave immediately.

I had gone a dozen yards or more when I heard my mother calling me. I stopped unsteadily in my tracks.

"I'm going to the movies," I told her. "I'll be back soon."

"All right, Frank," she said. "I was afraid you were going downtown or somewhere like that. Come home as soon as you can"

I ran a few steps and stopped. I was so afraid that she would make me stay at home if I told her that I was going downtown that I did not know what to do. I had never told her a lie, and I could not make myself start then. I looked back, and she was standing on the steps looking at me.

"Mother, I am going downtown," I told her, "but I'll be back early."

Before she could call me again, I ran with all my might down the street, around the corner, and raced to the hydrant at the alley. Rachel was not within sight until I had reached it and had stood for a moment panting and blowing with excitement and exertion.

She was there though, waiting for me beside the fence, and she said she had just got there the second before. After we had started towards the corner where the drug store was, I took the gold piece from my watch pocket and showed it to her. She was even more excited than I had been when I first saw it. After she had looked at it a while, and had felt it in the palm of her hand, I told her what I had planned for us to do that evening.

We heard a street car coming, and we ran to the corner just in time to get aboard. The ride downtown was too fast, even though it took us nearly half an hour to get there. We got off near the theaters.

First I had planned for us to go to a small restaurant, and later to a show. Just as we were passing a drug store Rachel touched my arm.

"Please, Frank," she said, "I'm awfully thirsty. Won't you take me into that drug store and get me a glass of water?"

"If you must have a drink right away, I will," I said, "but can't you wait a minute more? There's a restaurant a few doors below here, and we can get a glass of water there while we're waiting for our supper to be served. If we lose much time we won't have the chance to see a complete show."

"I'm afraid I can't wait, Frank," she said, clutching my arm. "Please—please get me a glass of water. Quick!"

We went into the drug store and stood in front of the soda fountain. I asked the clerk for a glass of water. Rachel waited close beside me, clutching my arm tighter and tighter.

In front of us, against the wall, there was a large mirror. I could see ourselves plainly, but there was something about our reflection, especially Rachel's, that I had never been aware of before. It's true that we had never stood before a mirror until then, but I saw there something that had escaped me for a whole year. Rachel's beauty was revealed in a way that only a large mirror can show. The curve of her cheeks and lips was as beautiful as ever, and the symmetrical loveliness of her neck and arms was the same beauty I had worshiped hundreds of times before; but now for the first time I saw in the mirror before us a new and unrevealed charm in the sinuous grace of her breasts, beginning

just below her shoulder and flowing with an expanding beauty down into the waist of her dress. I turned quickly and looked at her with my eyes, but though the softness of her breast was still there, I could not find the mirror's eyes to see the delicate growth which marked the flow that fell into the mysterious roundness rising from her body. I strained my eyes once more against the surface of the mirror, and once again I saw there the new sinuous beauty where her breasts began.

"Quick, Frank!" Rachel cried, clutching me desperately. "Water—please!"

I called to the clerk again, not looking, because I was afraid to take my eyes from the new beauty I saw in the mirror. I had never before seen such beauty in a woman. There was some mysterious reflection of light and shadow that had revealed the true loveliness of Rachel. The mirror had revealed in one short moment, like a flash of lightning in a dark room, the sinuous charm that had lain undiscovered and unseen during all the time I had known her. It was almost unbelievable that a woman, that Rachel, could possess such a new, and perhaps unique, beauty. My head reeled when the sensation enveloped me.

She clutched my arm again, breaking as one would a mirror, the reflection of my thoughts. The clerk had filled the glass with water and was handing it to her, but before he could place it in her hands, she had reached for it and had jerked it away from him. He looked as surprised as I was. Rachel had never before

acted like that. Everything she did had always been perfect.

She grasped the glass as if she were squeezing it, and she swallowed the water in one gulp. Then she thrust the glass back towards the clerk, holding her throat with one hand, and screamed for more water. Before he could refill the glass, she had screamed again, even louder than before. People passing the door paused, and ran inside to see what was taking place. Others in the store ran up to us and stared at Rachel.

"What's the matter, Rachel?" I begged her, catching her wrists and shaking her. "Rachel, what's the matter?"

Rachel turned and looked at me. Her eyes were turned almost upside down, and her lips were swollen and dark. The expression on her face was horrible to see.

A prescription clerk came running towards us. He looked quickly at Rachel, and ran back to the rear of the store. By that time she had fallen forward against the marble fountain, and I caught her and held her to keep her from falling to the floor.

The prescription clerk again came running towards us, bringing a glass filled with a kind of milk-white fluid. He placed the glass to Rachel's lips, and forced the liquid down her throat.

"I'm afraid it's too late," he said. "If we had known ten minutes sooner we could have saved her."

"Too late?" I asked him. "Too late for what? What's the matter with her?"

"She's poisoned. It looks like rat poison to me. It's probably that, though it may be some other kind."

I could not believe anything that was being said, nor could I believe that what I saw was real.

Rachel did not respond to the antidote. She lay still in my arms, and her face was becoming more contorted and darker each moment.

"Quick! Back here!" the clerk said, shaking me.

Together we lifted her and ran with her to the rear of the store. The clerk had reached for a stomach pump, and was inserting the tube in her throat. Just as he was about to get the pump started, a physician ran between us and quickly examined Rachel. He stood up a moment later, motioning the other man and myself aside.

"It's too late now," he said. "We might have been able to save her half an hour ago, but there is no heart-action now, and breathing has stopped. She must have taken a whole box of poison—rat poison, I guess. It has already reached her heart and blood."

The clerk inserted the tube again and began working with the pump. The physician stood beside us all the time, giving instructions, but shaking his head. We forced stimulants down her throat and attempted to revive her by means of artificial respiration. During all of that time the doctor behind us was saying: "No, no. It's of no use. She's too far gone now. She'll never live

again. She has enough rat poison in her system to kill ten men."

Some time later the ambulance came and took her away. I did not know where she was taken, and I did not try to find out. I sat in the little brown-paneled room surrounded by white-labeled bottles, looking at the prescription clerk who had tried so hard to save her. When at last I got up to go, the drug store was empty save for one clerk who looked at me disinterestedly. Outside in the street there was no one except a few taxi-drivers who never looked my way.

In a daze I started home through the deserted streets. The way was lonely, and tears blinded my eyes and I could not see the streets I walked on. I could not see the lights and shadows of the streets, but I could see with a painful clarity the picture of Rachel, in a huge mirror, bending over our garbage can while the reflection of a unique beauty in her sinuous breasts burned in my brain and in my heart.

The Medicine Man

THERE was nobody in Rawley who believed that Effie Henderson would ever find a man to marry her, and Effie herself had just about given up hope. But that was before the traveling herb doctor came to town.

Professor Eaton was a tall gaunt-looking man with permanent, sewn-in creases in his trousers and a high celluloid collar around his neck. He may have been ten years older than Effie, or he may have been ten years younger; it was no more easy to judge his age than it was to determine from what section of the country he had originally come.

He drove into Rawley one hot dusty morning in mid-August, selling Indian Root Tonic. Indian Root Tonic was a beady, licorice-tasting cure-all in a fancy green-blown bottle. The bottle was wrapped in a black and white label, on which the most prominent feature was the photographic reproduction of a beefy man exhibiting his expanded chest and muscles and his postage-stamp wrestler's trunks. Professor Eaton declared, and challenged any man alive to deny his statement, that his Indian Root Tonic would cure any ailment known to man, and quite a few known only to women.

Effie Henderson was the first person in town to give

him a dollar for a bottle, and the first to come back for the second one.

The stand that Professor Eaton had opened up was the back seat of his mud-spattered touring car. He had paid the mayor ten ragged one-dollar bills for a permit to do business in Rawley, and he had parked his automobile in the middle of the weed-grown vacant lot behind the depot. He sold his medicine over the back seat of his car, lifting the green-blown bottles from a box at his feet as fast as the customers came up and laid down their dollars.

There had been a big crowd standing around in the weed-grown lot the evening before, but there were only a few people standing around him listening to his talk when Effie came back in the morning for her second bottle. Most of the persons there then were Negroes who did not have a dollar between them, but who had been attracted to the lot by the alcoholic fumes around the mud-caked automobile and who were willing to be convinced of Indian Root Tonic's marvelous curative powers. When Effie came up, the Negroes stepped aside, and stood in a horseshoe at a distance watching Professor Eaton get ready to make another sale.

Effie walked up to the folded-down top in front of Professor Eaton and laid down a dollar bill that was as limp as a piece of wet cheesecloth.

"I just had to come back this morning for another bottle," Effie said, smiling up at Professor Eaton. "The one I took last night made me feel better than I have

ever felt before in all my life. There's not another medicine in the whole country like it, and I've tried them all, I reckon."

"Pardon me, madam," Professor Eaton said. "There are hundreds of preparations on the market today, but there is only one Indian Root Tonic. You will be doing me a great favor if you will hereafter refer to my aid-to-human-life by its true and trade-marked name. Indian Root Tonic is the name of the one and only cure for ailments of any nature. It is particularly good for the mature woman, madam."

"You shouldn't call me 'madam,' Professor Eaton," Effie said, lowering her head. "I'm just a young and foolish girl, and I'm not married yet, either."

Professor Eaton wiped the perspiration from his upper lip and looked down at Effie.

"How utterly stupid of me, my dear young lady," he said. "Anyone can see by looking at your fresh young face that you are a mere girl. Indian Root Tonic is particularly good for the young maiden."

Effie turned around to see if any of the Negroes were close enough to hear what Professor Eaton had said. She hoped that some of the women who lived on her street would walk past the corner in time to hear Professor Eaton talk like that about her.

"I never like to talk about myself, but don't you think I am too young yet to get married, Professor Eaton?"

"My dear young lady," he continued after having

paused long enough to relight his cigar, "Indian Root Tonic is particularly good for the unmarried girl. It is the greatest discovery known to medical science since the beginning of mankind. I personally secured the formula for this marvelous medicine from an old Indian chief out in our great West, and I was compelled to promise him on my bended knee that I would devote the remainder of my life to traveling over the country offering Indian Root Tonic to men and women like you who would be helpless invalids without it."

He had to pause for a moment's breath. It was then that he looked down over the folded top and for the first time looked at Effie face to face. The evening before in the glare of the gasoline torch, when the lot was crowded with people pushing and shoving to get to the medicine stand before the special introductory offer was withdrawn, he had not had time to look at everyone who came up to hand him a dollar for a bottle. But now when he looked down and saw Effie, he leaned forward to stare at her.

"Oh, Professor Eaton," Effie said, "you are such a wonderful man! Just to think that you are doing such a great work in the world!"

Professor Eaton continued to stare at Effie. She was as good-looking as the next girl in town, not over thirty, and when she fixed herself up, as she had done for nearly two hours that morning before leaving home, she usually had all the drummers in town for the day staring at her and asking the storekeepers who she was.

After a while Professor Eaton climbed out of the back seat of his car and came around to the rear where she was. He relit his cigar, and inspected Effie more closely.

"You know, Professor Eaton, you shouldn't talk like that to me," she said, evading his eyes. "You really don't know me well enough yet to call me 'dear girl.' This is the first time we have been alone together, and——"

"Why! I didn't think that a beautiful young girl like you would seriously object to my honorable admiration," he said, looking her up and down and screwing up his mouth when she plucked at her blouse. "It's so seldom that I have the opportunity of seeing such a charming young girl that I must have lost momentarily all sense of discretion. But, now that we are fully acquainted with each other, I'm sure you won't object to my devoted admiration. Will you?"

"Oh, Professor Eaton," Effie said excitedly, "do you really and truly think I am beautiful? So many men have told me that before, I'm accustomed to hearing it frequently, but you are the first man to say it so thrillingly!"

She tried to step backward, but she was already standing against the rear of the car. Professor Eaton moved another step closer, and there was no way for her to turn. She would not have minded that if she had not been so anxious to have a moment to look down at her blouse. She knew there must be something wrong,

surely something had slipped under the waist, because Professor Eaton had not raised his eyes from her bosom since he got out of the car and came down beside her. She wondered then if she should not have confined herself when she dressed that morning, putting on all the undergarments she wore to church on Sunday morning.

"My dear girl, there is not the slightest doubt in my mind concerning your beauty. In fact, I think you are the most charming young girl it has been my good fortune to encounter during my many travels over this great country of ours—from coast to coast, from the Lakes to the Gulf."

"You make me feel so young and foolish, Professor Eaton!" Effie said, smoothing her shirtwaist over her bosom. "You make me feel like——"

Professor Eaton turned abruptly and reached into the back seat for a bottle of Indian Root Tonic. He closed his teeth over the cork stopper and popped it out, and, with no further loss of time, handed it to Effie.

"Have this one on me, my dear girl," he said. "Just drink it down, and then see if it doesn't make you feel even better still."

Effie took the green-blown bottle, looking at the picture of the strong young man in wrestler's trunks.

"I drank the whole bottle I bought last night," she said. "I drank it just before going to bed, and it made me feel so good I just couldn't lie still. I had to get up and sit on the back porch and sing a while."

"There was never a more beneficial——"

"What particular ailment is the medicine good for, Professor Eaton?"

"Indian Root Tonic is good for whatever ails you. In fact, merely as a general conditioner it is supreme in its field. And then on the other hand, there is no complaint known to medical science that it has yet failed to allevi—to help."

Effie turned up the bottle and drank down the beady, licorice-tasting fluid, all eight ounces of it. The Negroes standing in a horseshoe around the car looked on wistfully while the fumes from the opened bottle drifted over the lot. Effie handed the empty bottle to Professor Eaton, after taking one last look at the picture on the label.

"Oh, Professor Eaton," she said, coming closer, "it makes me feel better already. I feel just like I was going to rise off the ground and fly away somewhere."

"Perhaps you would allow me——"

"To do what, Professor Eaton? What?"

"Perhaps you would allow me to escort you to your home," he said. "Now, it's almost dinner-time, and I was just getting ready to close up my stand until the afternoon, so if you will permit me, I'll be very glad to drive you home in my automobile. Just tell me how to get there, and we'll start right away."

"You talk so romantic, Professor Eaton," Effie said, touching his arm with her hand. "You make me feel just like a foolish young girl around you."

"Then you will permit me to see you home?"

"Of course, I will."

"Step this way please," he said, holding open the door and taking her arm firmly in his grasp.

After they had settled themselves in the front seat, Effie turned around and looked at Professor Eaton.

"I'll bet you have had just lots and lots of love affairs with young girls like me all over the country."

"On the contrary," he said, starting the motor, "this is the first time I have ever given my serious consideration to one of your sex. You see, I apply myself faithfully to the promotion, distribution, and sale of Indian Root Tonic. But this occasion, of course, draws me willingly from the cares of business. In fact, I consider your presence in my car a great honor. I have often wished that I might——"

"And am I the first young girl—the first woman you ever courted?"

"Absolutely," he said. "Absolutely."

Professor Eaton drove out of the vacant weed-grown lot and turned the car up the street towards Effie's house. She lived only two blocks away, and during the time it took them to drive that distance neither of them spoke. Effie was busy looking out to see if people were watching her ride with Professor Eaton in his automobile, and he was busily engaged in steering through the deep white sand in the street. When they got there, Effie told him to park the machine in front of the gate

where they could step out and walk directly into the house.

They got out and Effie led the way through the front door and into the parlor. She raised one of the shades a few inches and dusted off the sofa.

Professor Eaton stood near the middle of the room, looking uneasily through the small opening under the shade, and listening intently for sounds elsewhere in the house.

"Just sit down here on the sofa beside me," Effie said. "I know I am perfectly safe alone with you, Professor Eaton."

Effie closed her eyes and allowed herself the pleasure of feeling scared to death of Professor Eaton. It was an even nicer feeling than the one she had had the night before when she drank the first bottle of Indian Root Tonic and got into bed.

"And this is the ancestral home?" he asked.

"Don't let's talk about anything but you—and me," Effie said. "Wouldn't you just like to talk about us?"

Professor Eaton began to feel more at ease, now that it was evident that they were alone in the house.

"Perhaps," Professor Eaton said, sitting closer to Effie and looking down once more at her blouse, "perhaps you will permit me to diagnose your complaint. You see, I am well versed in the medical science, and I can tell you how many bottles of Indian Root Tonic you should use in your particular case. Naturally, some

people require a greater number of bottles than others do."

Effie glanced out the window for a second, and then she turned to Professor Eaton.

"I won't have to——"

"Oh, no," he said, "that won't be at all necessary, though you may do as you like about it. I can just——"

"Are you sure it's perfectly all right, Professor Eaton?"

"Absolutely," he said. "Absolutely."

Effie smoothed her shirtwaist with her hands and pushed her shoulders forward. Professor Eaton bent towards her, reaching for her hand.

He held her hand for a few seconds, feeling her pulse, and then dropped it to press his ear against her bosom to listen to her heartbeat. While he listened, Effie tucked up a few loose strands of hair that had fallen over her temples.

"Perhaps," he said, raising his head momentarily, "perhaps if you will merely——"

"Of course, Professor Eaton," Effie said excitedly.

He bent closer after she had fumbled nervously with the blouse and pressed his head against her breasts. Her heartbeat jarred his eardrum.

After a while Professor Eaton sat up and loosened the knot in his necktie and wiped the perspiration from his upper lip with the back of his hand. It was warm in the room, and there was no ventilation with the door closed.

"Perhaps I have already told you——"

"Oh, no! You haven't told me!" she said eagerly, holding her hands tightly clasped and looking down at herself with bated breath. "Please go ahead and tell me, Professor Eaton!"

"Perhaps," he said, fingering the open needlework in her blouse, "perhaps you would like to know that Indian Root Tonic is the only complete aid for general health on the market today. And in addition to its general curative properties, Indian Root Tonic possesses the virtues most women find themselves in need of during the middle and later stages of life. In other words, it imparts a vital force to the glands that are in most need of new vitality. I am sure that once you discover for yourself the marvelous power of rejuvenation that Indian Root Tonic possesses, you will never again be alone in the house without it. In fact, I can say without fear of successful contradiction that——"

Effie laid her blouse aside.

"Do you want me to take——"

"Oh, yes; by all means," he replied hastily. "Now, as I was saying——"

"And this, too, Professor Eaton? This, too?"

Professor Eaton reached over and pinched her lightly. Effie giggled and passed her hands over her bosom as though she were smoothing her shirtwaist.

"I don't suppose you happen to have another bottle of that tonic in your pocket, do you, Professor Eaton?"

"I'm afraid I haven't," he said, "but just outside in

my car there are several cases full. If you'll let me, I'll step out and——"

"Oh, no!" Effie cried, clutching at his arms and pulling him back beside her. "Oh, Professor Eaton, don't leave me now!"

"Very well," he said, sitting down beside her once more. "And now as I was saying, Indian Root Tonic's supernatural powers of re——"

"Professor Eaton, do you want me to take off all of this—like this?"

"Absolutely," he said. "And Indian Root Tonic has never been known to fail, whereas in so many——"

"You don't want me to leave anything——"

"Of course not. Being a doctor of the medical science, in addition to my many other activities, I need absolute freedom. Now, if you feel that you cannot place yourself entirely in my hands, perhaps it would be better if I——"

"Oh, please don't go!" Effie cried, pulling him back to the sofa beside her. "You know I have complete confidence in your abilities, Professor Eaton. I know you wouldn't——"

"Wouldn't do what?" he asked, looking down at her again.

"Oh, Professor Eaton! I'm just a young girl!"

"Well," he said, "if you are ready to place yourself entirely in my hands, I can proceed with my diagnosis. Otherwise——"

"I was only teasing you, Professor Eaton!" Effie said, squeezing his hand. "Of course, I trust you. You are such a strong man, and I know you wouldn't take advantage of a weak young girl like me. If you didn't take care of me, I'd more than likely run away with myself."

"Absolutely," he said. "Now, if you will continue removing the——"

"There is only this left, Professor Eaton," Effie said. "Are you sure it will be all right?"

"Absolutely."

"But I feel so—so bare, Professor Eaton."

"'Tis only natural to feel like that," he said, comforting her. "A young girl who has never before experienced the——"

"Experienced the what?"

"Well—as I was saying——"

"You make me feel so funny, Professor Eaton. And are you sure——"

"Absolutely," he said. "Absolutely."

"I've never felt like this before. It feels like——"

"Just place yourself completely in my hands, my dear young girl, and I promise nothing will——"

Without warning the parlor door was thrown open and Effie's brother, Burke, came in. Burke was the town marshal.

"Is dinner ready, Effie?" Burke asked, standing in the doorway and trying to accustom his eyes to the

near-darkness of the parlor. "It's a quarter after twelve and——"

Burke stopped in the midst of what he was saying and stared at Effie and Professor Eaton. Effie screamed and pushed Professor Eaton away from her. He got up and stood beside Effie and the sofa, looking first at Burke and then at Effie. He did not know what to do. Effie reached for the things she had thrown aside. Professor Eaton bent down and picked up something and threw it at her.

The room suddenly appeared to Professor Eaton to be as bright as day.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Burke said, coming slowly across the floor. His holster hung from his right hip, and it swung heavily as he swayed from step to step. "I'll be damned!"

Professor Eaton stood first on one foot and then on the other. He was between Effie and her brother, and he knew of no way by which he could change his position in the room. He wished to get as far away from Effie as he possibly could. Until she had dressed herself, he hoped he would not be forced to look at her.

Burke stepped forward and pushed Professor Eaton aside. He looked at Effie and at the herb doctor, but he gave no indication of what he intended doing.

Professor Eaton shifted the weight of his body to his other foot, and Burke's hand dropped to the top of the holster, his fingers feeling for the pearl handle that protruded from it.

Effie snapped a safety-pin and ran between Burke and Professor Eaton. She was still not completely dressed, but she was fully covered.

"What are you going to do, Burke?" she cried.

"That all depends on what the professor is going to do," Burke said, still fingering the pearl handle on the pistol. "What is the professor going to do?"

"Why, Professor Eaton and I are going to be married, Burke," she said. "Aren't we, Professor Eaton?"

"I had not intended making known the announcement of our engagement and forthcoming marriage at this time," he said, "but since we are to be married very shortly, Effie's brother should by all means be the first to know of our intentions."

"Thanks for telling me, professor," Burke said. "It had better by a damn sight be forthcoming."

Effie ran to Professor Eaton and locked her arms around his neck.

"Oh, do you really mean it, Professor Eaton? I'm so happy I don't know what to do! But why didn't you tell me sooner that you really wanted to marry me? Do you really and truly mean it, Professor Eaton?"

"Sure," Burke said; "he means it."

"I'm the happiest girl in the whole town of Rawley," Effie cried, pressing her face against Professor Eaton's celluloid collar. "It was all so unexpected! I had never dreamed of it happening to me so soon!"

Burke backed across the room, one hand still around the pearl handle that protruded from the cow-hide hol-

ster. He backed across the room and reached for the telephone receiver on the wall. He rang the central office and took the receiver from the hook.

"Hello, Janie," he said into the mouthpiece. "Ring up Reverend Edwards for me, will you, right away."

Burke leaned against the wall, looking at Effie and Professor Eaton while Janie at the central office was ringing the Reverend Edwards' number.

"Just to think that I'm going to marry a traveling herb doctor!" Effie said. "Why! all the girls in town will be so envious of me they won't speak for a month!"

"Absolutely," Professor Eaton said, pulling tight the loosened knot in his tie and adjusting it in the opening of his celluloid collar. "Absolutely. Indian Root Tonic has unlimited powers. It is undoubtedly the medical and scientific marvel of the age. Indian Root Tonic has been known to produce the most astounding results in the annals of medical history."

Effie pinned up a strand of hair that had fallen over her forehead and looked proudly upon Professor Eaton.

Picking Cotton

ABOUT an hour after sunrise every morning during the cotton picking season, people began coming towards the Donnie Williams farm from all directions. They came walking over the fields from eight and ten miles away, following the drain ditches, wading waist-high through the brown broomsedge in the fallow land, and shuffling through the yellow road dust. They came in pairs, in families, and in droves.

There were nearly five hundred acres of cotton to gather, and the Williamses were paying thirty-five cents a hundred pounds. Besides that, though, there were good-sized watermelons for every man, woman, and child, both white and colored, at dinner-time. Everybody liked to pick cotton at the Donnie Williams place, even though some of the farmers who could not find enough hands were offering forty cents a hundred pounds, and even up as high as fifty cents. But none of them had free watermelons for everybody.

Even though everyone liked to pick cotton for Donnie Williams, there were never the same people in the fields for two consecutive days. A man, with his family, would work for Donnie a day, and then stay at home a day to pick his own crop, or to just lie around the house

and rest. Then there were the drifters who never stayed at one farm longer than a day. They had no homes to go to at night, so they slept in field-houses and went to the next farm the following day. There were always new pickers arriving, and usually there were just as many people coming as there were leaving.

It had become a custom at Donnie Williams' place for the pickers to work in pairs. Donnie had tried out all kinds of schemes to get his crop gathered as quickly as he could before the price began to fall, and he had found out that people could, and would, pick better if they worked in pairs. Sometimes, otherwise, when there were crowds of twenty and thirty together, all of them would stop picking to laugh at a joke, and stand up to talk with the others. Ten or fifteen minutes wasted of every hour cut down the number of pounds a man could gather in a day, and Donnie was trying to get his crop through the gins as soon as possible.

I sometimes paired-off with a Negro boy named Sonny. He and I had a lot to talk about, because he worked as houseboy for Mrs. Williams when he was not needed in the fields, and he knew a lot that I was anxious to hear.

Three or four times I had paired-off with a red-headed girl from across the country. Her name was Gertie. She was about fifteen, and she knew more riddles than anybody I ever saw. She used to ask me riddles all the time we were picking, and when I could not answer them and had to give up, she would sit down,

lift her calico skirt, and fan her face with it while she laughed at me for not knowing the answers.

Once she asked me if I knew what was the age of consent. I was not certain that I did know.

"Come on and tell me, Gertie," I begged her.

"You think it over tonight, Harry," she said, "and if you don't know by tomorrow, I'll tell you."

Gertie had a habit of giggling when she asked me something like that, and now she was giggling again. All that time she was fanning her face with her skirt, drawing the calico higher and higher above her waist while she laughed at me.

"It's real funny," she giggled.

There was nothing funny to me about a riddle I could not answer, nor even guess, but no amount of begging would ever make Gertie tell me the answer to that one. She would always sit down on her cotton-bag, cross her slender round legs under her, and fan her face with her skirt while she giggled because I did not know what to say.

It was all right for her to do that if she wished to, but I was never able to pick much cotton and look at her naked from the waist down at the same time. She would sit there and giggle about the riddle, fanning herself furiously, and smile at me. It would even have been all right for her to sit down on her cotton-bag and lift her skirt like that if only she had worn something under the one-piece calico wrapper. As long as I knew Gertie though, she never did.

"Why does an old maid look under the bed at night before she puts out the light, Harry?"

"God damn it, Gertie!" I shouted at her. "Why don't you keep your dress down where it belongs!"

I could not pick cotton when she did like that, and it made me angry.

"You can make up good riddles, too, can't you, Harry?" she said.

I was just getting ready to jump over to her row and throw her down when I looked around and saw Donnie Williams walking across the field not far away, and I had to go back to work right away.

After picking with one of the Johnsons for two days, I again paired-off one morning with Gertie. We started off at a fast pace, each of us trying his best to get ahead of the other. Gertie had thought up a lot of new riddles to ask me, but we were so busy trying to leave each other behind that she did not have time to say anything to me for several hours.

It was about dinner-time when I heard her whistle to me. I turned around to see what she wished.

"Harry," she said, straightening up and packing the cotton in her bag with her feet, "do you see that black-haired girl over there with the old woman?"

She pointed over the rows towards them.

"What about her?" I asked.

"She was paired-off yesterday with that Dennis boy, and last night she weighed-in four hundred pounds, and the boy had only fifty pounds."

"Hell, Gertie," I said, "that's no riddle. Can't you think up a better one than that? She's not the first to weigh-in more than a man. You can see them stripping over in the broomsedge almost any time that Donnie's not around."

"I don't suppose she is," Gertie said, sitting down and fanning her face with the calico skirt, "because I weighed-in three-fifty myself the other night when I was picking with Sonny. He didn't have much more than forty pounds at quitting-time, either."

That made me angry. I threw off the strap over my shoulder and jumped over the row beside her.

"God damn you, Gertie," I shouted, hitting her on the face with my fists, "did you let that damn nigger——"

"Let him do what?" she asked, giggling a little and pulling her skirt above her waist. "Did I let him give me some of his cotton?"

"Yes——"

"Sonny gave me only a hundred pounds, Harry."

"I'm going to beat hell out of him," I told her. "He ought to have better sense than to pair-off with a white girl. And anyway, he ought to have given you two hundred pounds——"

Gertie twisted her shoulders from side to side and her heavy breasts shook until I thought that they would surely burst.

"I've just thought of a good riddle, Harry!" she said, naked again from her waist down. "Listen to this!"

if Sonny offered me a hundred pounds and you offered me two hundred, which one of you would I rather have take me!"

"Any fool knows that two hundred is twice as much as one hundred, Gertie. And anyway, Sonny is a nigger!"

"When are you ever going to learn how to answer riddles, Harry?" she said, fanning herself faster and faster. "Two hundred is twice as much as one hundred, but you're not Sonny."

She had begun to giggle, but before she could laugh at me, I caught her and threw her down, and began stuffing cotton into her mouth.

"That damn nigger, Sonny, won't ever——"

I said that much, but I never finished saying all I had meant to tell her when I jumped on her. I could see by looking into her eyes that she had thought of a new riddle, and that as soon as I took the cotton from her mouth she would ask me another one that I could not answer.

Meddlesome Jack

HOD SHEPPARD was in the kitchen eating breakfast when he heard one of the colored boys yell for him. Before he could get up and look out the window to see what the trouble was, Daisy came running into the room from the garden-house in the field looking as if she had been scared out of her wits.

"Hod! Hod!" she screamed at him. "Did you hear it?"

He shook her loose from him and got up from the table. Daisy fell down on the kitchen floor, holding on to his legs with all her might.

"Hear what?" he said. "I heard one of the niggers yelling for me. That's all I heard. What's the matter with you, Daisy?"

Just then Sam, the colored boy, called Hod again, louder than ever. Both Hod and Daisy ran to the back door and looked out across the field. The only thing out there they could see was the yellow broomsedge and the dead-leafed blackjack.

"What's all this fuss and racket about, anyway?" Hod said, looking at Daisy.

"I heard something, Hod," she said, trembling.

"Heard what? What did you hear?"

"I don't know what it was, but I heard it."

"What did it sound like—wind, or something?"

"It sounded like—like somebody calling me, Hod."

"Somebody calling you?"

She nodded her head, holding him tightly.

"Who's calling you! If I ever find anybody around here calling you out of the house, I'll butcher him. You'd better not let me see anybody around here after you. I'll kill him so quick——"

Sam came running around the corner of the house, his overall jumper flying out behind, and his crinkly hair jumping like a boxful of little black springs let loose. His eyes were almost white.

"Hey there, you Sam!" Hod yelled at him. "Quit your running around and come back here!"

"Sam heard him, too," Daisy said, standing beside Hod and trembling as if she would fall apart. "Sam's running away from him."

"Heard what—heard who! What's the matter with you, Daisy?"

Daisy held Hod tighter, looking with one eye out across the broomsedge. Hod pushed her away and walked out into the backyard. He stood there only a minute before the sound of Sam's pounding feet on the hard white sand grew louder and louder. Sam turned the corner of the house a second later, running even faster than he had before. His eyes were all white by that time, and it looked as if his hair had grown several inches since Hod had last seen him.

Hod reached out and caught Sam's jumper. There was a ripping sound, and Hod looked down to find that he was holding a piece of Sam's overall. Sam was around the house out of sight before Hod could yell at him to stop and come back.

"That nigger is scared of something," Hod said, looking in the doorway at Daisy.

"Sam heard him," Daisy said, trembling.

Hod ran to Daisy and put both hands on her shoulders and shook her violently.

"Heard who!" he yelled at her. "If you don't tell me who it was around here calling you, I'll choke the life out of you. Who was around here calling you? If I catch him, I'll kill him so quick——"

"You're choking me, Hod!" Daisy screamed. "Let me loose! I don't know who it was—honest to God, I don't know who it was, Hod!"

Hod released her and ran out into the yard. Sam had turned and was running down the road towards the lumber mill a mile away. The town was down there. Two stores, the post office, the lumber mill, and the bank were scorching day after day in an oval of baked clay and sand. Sam was halfway to Folger by then.

"So help me!" Daisy screamed. "There he is, Hod!"

She ran into the kitchen, slamming and bolting the door.

Out behind the barn Amos Whittle, Sam's father, was coming through the broomsedge with his feet fly-

ing behind him so fast that they looked like the paddles on a watermill. He had both hands gripped around the end of a rope, and the rope was being jerked by the biggest, the ugliest, and the meanest-looking jack that Hod had ever seen in his whole life. The jack was loping through the broomsedge like a hoop-snake, jerking Amos from side to side as if he had been the cracker on the end of a rawhide whip.

"Head him, Mr. Hod!" Amos yelled. "Head him!"

Hod stood looking at Amos and the jack while they loped past him. He turned and watched them with mouth agape while they made a wide circle in the broomsedge and started back towards the house and barn again.

"Head him, Mr. Hod!" Amos begged. "Please, Mr. Hod, head him!"

Hod picked up a piece of mule-collar and threw it at the jack's head. The jack stopped dead in his tracks, throwing out his front feet and dragging his hind feet on the hard white sand. The animal had stopped so suddenly that Amos found himself wedged between his two hind legs.

Hod walked towards them and pulled Amos out, but Amos was up and on his feet before there was any danger of his being kicked.

"Where'd you get that jack, Amos?" Hod said.

"I don't know where I got him, but I sure wish I'd never seen him. I been all night trying to hold him,

Mr. Hod. I ain't slept a wink, and my old woman's taken to the tall bushes. She and the girls heard him, and they must have thought I don't know exactly what, because they went off yelling about being scared to hear a sound like that jack makes."

The jack walked leisurely over to the barn door and began eating some nubbins that Hod had dropped between the crib and the stalls. One ear stood straight up, and the other one lay flat on his neck. He was the meanest-looking jackass that had ever been in that part of the country. Hod had never seen anything like him before.

"Get him away from here, Amos," Hod said. "I don't want no jack around here."

"Mr. Hod," Amos said, "I wish I could get him away somewhere where I'd never see him again. I sure wish I could accommodate you, Mr. Hod. He's the troublesomest jack I ever seen."

"Where'd you get him, Amos? What are you doing with him, anyway?"

Amos glanced at Hod, but only for a moment. He kept both eyes on the jack.

"I traded that old dollar watch of mine for him yesterday, Mr. Hod, but that jack ain't worth four-bits to me. I don't know what them things are made for, anyhow."

"I'll give you fifty cents for him," Hod said.

"You will!" Amos shouted. "Lord mercy, Mr. Hod,

give it here! I'll sure be glad to get rid of that jack for four-bits. He done drove my wife and grown girls crazy, and I don't know what mischief he'll be up to next. If you'll give me fifty cents for him, I'll sure be much obliged to you, Mr. Hod. I don't want to have nothing more to do with that jackass."

"I don't want him around, either," Hod said, turning to look through the kitchen window, "but I figure on making me some money with him. How old is that jack, Amos?"

"Fellow said he was three years old, but I don't know no way of telling a jack's age, and I don't aim to find out."

"He looks like he might be three or four. I'm going to buy him from you, Amos. I figure on making me a lot of money out of that jack. I don't know any other way to make money these days. I can't seem to get it out of the ground."

"Sure, sure, Mr. Hod. You're welcome to that jack. You're mighty much welcome to him. I don't want to have nothing more to do with no jackass. I wish now I had my watch back, but I reckon it's stopped running by now, anyhow. It was three years old, and it never did keep accurate time for me. I'll sure be tickled to get four-bits for that jack, Mr. Hod."

Hod counted out fifty cents in nickels and dimes and handed the money to Amos.

"Now, you've got to help me halter that jack, Amos,"

Hod said. "Get yourself a good piece of stout rope. Plow lines won't be no good on him."

"I don't know about haltering that jack, Mr. Hod. Looks like to me he's never been halter-broke. If it's all the same to you, Mr. Hod, I'd just as leaf go on home now. I've got some stove-wood to chop, and I got to——"

"Wait a minute," Hod said. "I'll get the rope to halter him with. You go in the house and wake up Shaw. He's in the bed asleep. You go in there and get him up and tell him to come out here and help us halter the jack. Ain't no sense in him sleeping all morning. I'm damned tired of seeing him do it. When he comes home, he ought to get out and help do some work about the place."

Shaw was Hod's brother who had been at home seven or eight days on leave from the Navy. He was getting ready to go back to his ship in Norfolk in a day or two. Shaw was two years younger than Hod, and only a few years older than Daisy. Daisy was nineteen then.

"I'd sure like to accommodate you, Mr. Hod," Amos said, "but the last time you sent me in to wake up Mr. Shaw, Mr. Shaw he jumped out of bed on top of me and near about twisted my neck off. He said for me never to wake him up again as long as I live. Mr. Hod, you'd better go wake up Mr. Shaw your own self."

Hod reached down and picked up a piece of stove-

wood. He walked towards Amos swinging the stick in his hand.

"I said go in the house and get him up," Hod told Amos again. "Wish that sailor wouldn't come here to stay in bed half the day and be all the time telling Daisy tales."

Amos opened the kitchen door and went into the house. Hod walked towards the barn where the jack was calmly eating red nubbins by the crib door.

When Hod reached the barnyard gate, the jack lifted his head and looked at him. He had two or three nubbins of red corn in his jaws, and he stopped chewing and crunching the grains and cobs while he looked at Hod. One of the jack's ears lay flat against the top of his head and neck, and the other one stood straight up in the air, as stiff as a cow's horn. The jack's ears were about ten or twelve inches long, and they were as rigid as bones.

Hod tossed the piece of stove-wood aside and walked to the opened gate for a piece of rope. He believed he could halter the jack by himself.

He started into the barnyard, but he had gone no farther than a few steps when boards began to fly off the side of the barn. The mare in the stall was kicking like a pump-gun. One after the other, the boards flew off, the mare whinnied, and the jack stood listening to the pounding of the mare's hooves against the pine boards.

'When Hod saw what was happening to his barn, he

ran towards the jack, yelling and waving his arms and trying to get him to the leeward side of the barn.

"Howie! Howie!" he yelled at the jack.

As long as the mare got wind of the jack, nothing could make her stop kicking the boards off the barn from the inside. Hod jumped at the jack, waving his arms and shouting at him.

"Howie! Howie!"

He continued throwing up his arms to scare the jack away, but the jack just turned and looked at Hod with one ear up and one ear down.

"Howie! You ugly-looking son-of-a-bitch! Howie!"

Hod turned around to look towards the house to see if Shaw and Amos were coming. He turned just in time to see Amos jumping out the window.

"Hey there, Amos!" Hod yelled. "Where's Shaw?"

"Mr. Shaw says he ain't going to get up till he gets ready to. Mr. Shaw cussed pretty bad and made me jump out the window."

The jack began to paw the ground. Hard clods of stableyard sand and manure flew behind him in all directions. Hod yelled at him again.

"Howie! Howie! You flop-eared bastard!"

The jack stopped and turned his head to look at Amos on the other side of the fence.

"Mr. Hod," Amos said, "if you don't mind, I'd like to have a word with you."

Hod yelled at Amos and at the jack at the same time.

"Mr. Hod," Amos said, "if I don't go home now

and chop that stove-wood, me and my folks won't have no dinner."

"Come back here!" Hod shouted at him.

Amos came as far as the gate, but he would not come any farther.

Suddenly the jack lifted his head high in the air and brayed. It sounded as if someone were blowing a trumpet in the ear.

The bray had no more than died out when the mare began pounding the boards with both hind hooves, the boards flying off the side of the barn faster than Hod could count them. He turned and looked to see what Amos was doing, and over his head he saw Daisy at the window. She looked as if she had completely lost her mind.

The jack brayed again, louder than ever, and then he leaped for the open barnyard gate. Hod threw the rope at him, but the rope missed him by six feet. The jack was through the gate and out around the house faster than Hod could yell. Amos stood as if his legs had been fence posts four feet in the ground.

The jack stopped at the open bedroom window, turned his head towards the house, and brayed as if he were calling all the mares in the entire county. Daisy ran to the window and looked out, and when she saw the jack no more than arm's length from her, she screamed and fell backward on the floor.

"Head him, Amos! Head him!" Hod yelled, running towards the jack.

Amos' feet were more than ever like fence posts. He was shaking like a tumble-weed, but his legs and feet were as stiff as if they had been set in concrete.

"Where in hell is that God damn sailor!" Hod yelled. "Why in hell don't he get up and help me some around here! If I had the time now, I'd go in there with a piece of cord-wood and break every bone in his head. The son-of-a-bitch comes home here on leave once a year and stays in bed all day and stays out all night to run after women. If the son-of-a-bitch comes here again, I'll kill him!"

"Yonder goes your jack, Mr. Hod," Amos said.

Daisy stuck her head out of the window again. She was looking to see where the jack was, and she did not look at Hod. She was standing there pulling at herself, and getting more wild-eyed every second. She disappeared from sight as quickly as she had first appeared.

"Come on, you black bastard," Hod said; "let's go after him. I ought to pick up a stick and break your neck for bringing that God damn jack here to raise the devil. He's got the mare kicking down the barn, and Daisy is in there acting crazy as hell."

They started out across the broomsedge after the loping jack. The jack was headed for Folger, a mile away.

"If I ever get my hands on that jack, I'll twist his neck till it looks like a corkscrew," Hod panted, running and leaping over the yellow broomsedge. "Ain't no female safe around a sailor or a jack, and here I

am running off after one, and leaving the other in the house."

They lost sight of the jackass in a short while. The beast had begun to circle the town, and he was now headed down the side of the railroad tracks behind the row of Negro cabins. They soon saw him again, though, when the jack slowed down at a pasture where some horses were grazing.

A hundred yards from the cabins they had to run down into a gully. Just as they were crawling up the other side, a Negro girl suddenly appeared in front of them, springing up in front of them from nowhere. She was standing waist-high in the broomsedge, and she was as naked as a pickaninny.

Hod stopped and looked at her.

"Did you see a jack?" he said to her.

"White-folks, I saw that jack, and he brayed right in my face. I just jumped up and started running. I can't sit still when I hear a jackass bray."

Hod started off again, but he stopped and came back to look at the girl.

"Put your clothes back on," he said. "You'll get raped running around in the sedge this close to town like that."

"White-captain," she said, "I ain't hard to rape. I done heard that jackass bray."

Hod turned and looked at Amos for a moment. Amos was walking around in a circle with his hands in his pockets.

"Come on," Hod told him, breaking through the broomsedge. "Let's get that jack, Amos."

They started towards the pasture where the jack had stopped. When the jack saw them coming, he turned and bolted over the railroad tracks and started jogging up the other side of the tracks towards Folger. Hod cut across to head him off, and Amos was right behind to help.

There were very few men in town at that time of day. Several storekeepers sat on Coca Cola crates on the sidewalk under the shade of the wateroak trees, and several men were whittling white pine and chewing tobacco. The bank was open, and RB, the cashier, was standing in the door looking out across the railroad tracks and dusty street. Down at the lumber mill, the saws whined hour after hour. It was the kind of tune that either put men to sleep or else drove them crazy.

The jack slowed down and ran into the hitching-yard behind the brick bank. When Hod saw that the jack had stopped, he also stopped running and tried to regain his breath. Both he and Amos were panting and sweating. The August sun shone down on the dry baked clay in the oval where the town was and remained there until sunset.

Hod and Amos sat down in the shade of the depot and fanned themselves with their hats. The jack was standing calmly behind the bank, switching flies with his tail.

"Give me back my fifty cents, Amos," Hod said.

"You can have that God damn jack. I don't want him."

"I couldn't do that, Mr. Hod," Amos pleaded. "We done made the trade, and I can't break it now. You'll just have to keep that jack. He's yours now. If you want to get shed of him, go sell him to somebody else. I don't want that jack. I'd heap rather have my old dollar watch back again. I wish I'd never seen that jack in all my life. I can do without him."

Hod said nothing. He looked at the brick bank and saw RB looking out across the railroad tracks towards the stores where the men were sitting on upturned Coca Cola crates in the wateroak shade.

"Sit here and wait," Hod said, getting up. "I've just thought of something. You sit here and keep your eyes on that jack till I come back."

"You won't be gone long, will you, Mr. Hod? I don't mind watching your animal for you, but I'd sure hate to have to look at that jack any more than I'm compelled to. He don't like my looks, and I sure don't like his. That's the ugliest-looking creature that's ever been in this country."

"Wait here till I get back," Hod said, crossing the tracks and walking towards the brick bank.

RB saw Hod coming, and he went back inside and stood behind his cashier's cage.

Hod walked in, took off his hat, and leaned his arm on the little shelf in front of the cage.

"Hello, RB," he said. "It's hot today, ain't it?"

"Do you want to deposit money, or make a loan?"

Hod fanned himself and spat into the cuspidor.

"Miss it?" RB asked, trying to see through the grill.

"Not quite," Hod said.

RB spat into his own cuspidor at his feet.

"What can I do for you?" he said.

"Well, I'll tell you, RB," Hod said. "It's like this. You've got all this money here in the bank and it ain't doing you much good where it is. And here I come with all my money tied up in livestock. There ain't but one answer to that, is there?"

"When did you get some livestock, Hod?" he asked.

"I didn't know you had anything but that old mare and that gray mule."

• "I made a trade today," Hod said, "and now just when my money is all tied up in livestock, I find a man who's willing to let me in on a timber deal. I need fifty dollars to swing my share. There ain't no use trying to farm these days, RB. That's why I'm going in for livestock and timber."

"How many head of stock do you own?"

"Well, I've got that mare, Ida, out there at my place, but I ain't counting her. And likewise that old mule."

"How many others do you own?"

"I purchased a high-class stud animal this morning, RB, and I paid out all my ready cash in the deal."

"A bull?"

"No, not exactly a bull, RB."

"What was it then?"

"A jackass, RB."

"A jackass!"

"That's right."

"Who in hell wants to own a jackass, Hod? I can't lend the bank's money on a jackass."

"You're in the money-lending business, RB, and I've got an animal to mortgage. What else do you want? I'm putting up my jack, and you're putting up your money. That's business, RB. That's good business."

"Yes, but suppose you force me to foreclose the mortgage—I'd have the jack, and then maybe I couldn't find a buyer. Jackass buyers are pretty scarce customers, Hod. I don't recall ever seeing one."

"Anybody would give you a hundred dollars for a good high-class jack, RB. If you knew as much about farming and stock-raising as you do about banking, you'd recognize that without me having to tell you."

"What does a jackass look like?"

"A jack don't look so good to the eye, RB, but that's not a jack's high point. When a jack brays——"

RB came running around from behind his cage and caught Hod by the arm. He was so excited that he was trembling.

"Is that what I heard last night, Hod?"

"What?"

"A jackass braying."

"Wouldn't be surprised if you did. Amos was out exercising him last night, and he said the jack brayed almost all night long."

"Come back here with me," RB said, still shaking. "I'm going to let you have that loan, and take a mortgage on that jack. I want to have a hand in it. If I'll let you have the loan, will you let me take the jack home and keep him at my house for about a week, Hod?"

"You're more than welcome to him, RB. You can keep him all the time if you want to. But why do you want to keep a jack at your house? You don't breed mules, do you?"

RB had Hod sign the papers before he replied. He then counted out five ten-dollar bills and put them into Hod's hand.

"This is just between me and you, Hod," he said. "Me and my wife haven't been on speaking terms for more than a month now. She cooks my meals and does all her housework, but she's been mad at me about something and she won't say a word or have anything to do with me. But last night, sometime after midnight, we were lying there in the bed, she as far on her side as she could get without falling out, and all at once I heard the damndest yell I ever heard in all my life. It was that jackass braying. I know now what it was, but I didn't know then. That jack was somewhere out in the sedge, and when he brayed, the first thing I knew, my wife was clear under me, she was that scared, or something. That sounds like a lie, after I have told you about her not speaking to me for more than a month, and sleeping as far on her side of the bed as she could

get without falling on the floor, but it's the truth if I know what the truth is. That jack brayed just once, and the first thing I knew, my wife was underneath me, hugging me and begging me not to leave her. This morning she took up her old ways again, and that's why I want to stable that jack at my house for a week or two. He'll break up that streak of not talking and not having anything to do with me. That jack is what I am in need of, Hod."

Hod took the money and walked out of the bank towards the depot where Amos was.

"Where's the jack, Hod?" RB said, running after him.

"Out there behind your bank," Hod said. "You can take him home with you tonight when you close up."

Amos got up to meet Hod.

"Come on, Amos," Hod said. "We're going home."

Amos looked back over his shoulder at the jack behind the bank, watching him until he was out of sight. They walked through the broomsedge, circling the big gully, on the way home.

When they reached the front yard, Hod saw Sam sitting under a chinaberry tree. Sam got up and stood leaning against the trunk.

"What are you doing here?" Hod asked him. "What are you hanging around here for? Go on home, Sam."

Sam came forward a step, and stepped backward two.

"Miss Daisy told me to tell you something for her," Sam said, chewing the words.

"She said what?"

"Mr. Hod, Miss Daisy and Mr. Shaw went off down the road while you was chasing that jack. Mr. Shaw said he was taking Miss Daisy with him back to the navy yard, and Miss Daisy said she was going off and never coming back."

Hod went to the front porch and sat down in the shade. His feet hung over the edge of the porch, almost touching the ground.

Amos walked across the yard and sat down on the steps. He looked at Hod for several minutes before he said anything.

"Mr. Hod," he said, chewing the words worse than his son had before him, "I reckon you'd better go back to Folger and get your jack. Looks like that jack has a powerful way of fretting the women-folks, and you'd better get him to turn one in your direction."

The Picture

THE first question John Nesbit asked Pauline when she told him that she had employed a new maid and nurse for the children, was the same thing he had always said when another servant came to take the place of one that had left.

"Pauline, what kind of a—are you sure that she is a good Negress?"

"She is a splendid housemaid, John, and she knows how to care for the children. Both Jay and Claire love her, and they obey her to the last word. She had the best recommendations of any servant we've ever hired. Mamie is the kind of maid I have wanted ever since we were married."

"Yes, I know," John said; "but is this new maid a good Negress?"

"Her recommendations were perfect, John. I haven't any reason to suspect her of not being a suitable nurse for the children."

"Well, you have seen her, and I haven't. I'd much rather not have a servant in the house than to employ one who wasn't a good Negress. I've seen too many of them at the plantation, when I was a kid growing up, to have one of that kind in the house."

"Don't worry about Mamie, John," Pauline said.

"I'm sure she is a good girl. If she isn't, we can always ask her to leave."

That settled the matter for the rest of the evening. The next afternoon, though, when he reached home from the mills, John saw the new maid on the lawn with Jay and Claire. He drove his car into the garage and walked down the driveway to the side entrance. Just before he reached the steps he looked back over his shoulder at the colored girl sitting on the bench under the cedar trees. Both Jay and Claire had left Mamie and were running to meet him. He had a second chance to look at the girl before the children reached him.

Mamie was a brown girl with straightened hair. She had the slender body of a young woman and her long legs were straight and round-looking in the ash-colored stockings that covered them above her knees. John had noticed all that about her when he looked at her for the first time over his shoulder. When he looked the second time, he saw that Mamie was full-breasted.

After the children had become tired of climbing over his lap and had gone back outdoors to play on the lawn with their nurse, John asked Pauline again about the colored girl. John was the agent at the Glen Rock Cotton Mills, and he had grown to be unrelenting in questioning every man and woman to whom he gave employment. He expected Pauline to be the same about the colored servants she hired for the house.

"I saw that new nurse just now," he said.

"Don't you think she's all right?" she asked.

"That's for you to be certain about, Pauline. You have the opportunity of knowing her. Is she a good Negress? We certainly don't wish to have the other kind to nurse Jay and Claire. It would be better for us not to have any servants at all, than to have the kind that we do not want in the house."

"I wish you wouldn't worry so much about Mamie, John. I just know that she is all right. Please stop worrying about it. Leave her to me. If I find out that she is not a good girl, I'll discharge her. When you come home from the mills you should rest, and not let yourself be worried about the servants."

"I know I should, Pauline," he said, "but you don't know the colored people as I do. You were raised in the East, where the only colored people are the ones who are probably as good as the whites, but down here in Carolina it's different, and you haven't lived here long enough yet to be able to distinguish between the two kinds. I was raised on a plantation with colored people, and I grew up in a small town where more than half the population was colored. I know there are two kinds of them, just as you know there are at least two distinct classes of whites. The reason I ask about the servants as I do is that I want to be sure that you do not let them fool you. We wouldn't want the wrong kind of servants in the house caring for Jay and Claire."

"Of course, we don't," Pauline said. "Now, let's

forget about that. We must get ready for dinner soon. There isn't must time left for us to dress. It's an eight o'clock invitation."

Neither of them mentioned the new maid or the cook for several days. Pauline believed that John was assured at last that Mamie was a good Negress.

Less than a week later, though, something happened. Pauline missed one morning the silver-framed photograph of John that had been on the dressing-table in her room since the day they were married. Once each week, on Tuesdays, Pauline had cleaned the silver frame with cloth and paste, and on this Tuesday she could not find the picture anywhere in the house. She was not certain how long it had been missing from the table, because she had not consciously noticed it since Sunday. On Sunday she had dusted the silver and glass, and had put the silver-mounted photograph back on her dressing-table. But on Tuesday it was missing.

The moment she realized that the picture was missing, she ran to the 'phone to call up John at his office at the mills. But while the operator was connecting them she suddenly realized that telling John about the picture was the last thing she wished to do. She hung up hurriedly, hoping that he would not suspect that it was she calling. She sat beside the telephone, her hands gripped together, waiting for the bell to ring. After five minutes she got up and ran from the room.

Pauline's first thought after leaving the room was,

what in the world would John say to her if he should notice that the picture was missing! Suppose he should go to her room that evening after dinner and see that the photograph was not on her dressing-table! He would surely ask her about it—what on earth could she tell him! She ran from room to room, looking over every inch of space in the house for the silver-framed photograph, and when she had finished, she was still as helpless as she had been the moment that she discovered it was missing. The picture was not in the house. Pauline was certain of that. She had searched everywhere.

Della, the cook, was not there at that time of the afternoon, and it was Mamie's day off. If they had been there she would have run to them and asked if they had seen Mr. Nesbit's photograph. She would even have asked them if either had taken it and put it some place else. But there was no one there then except herself and the children. It did not occur to her to ask Jay and Claire if they had taken the photograph without permission. They were then in the play-house on the lawn.

She called to Jay and Claire as she ran to the garage for her car. Seating them beside her, she backed out the automobile, turned around in the driveway, and drove out into the boulevard. Pauline did not know where she was going until she had driven several blocks down the boulevard. It was then that she realized she had

turned the car towards the Quarter, and that in a short time she would be there.

Pauline passed Della's house without giving it more than a glance. After she had passed Della's she wondered why she had not stopped there to ask Della if she had seen Mr. Nesbit's photograph that had always been on the dressing-table in her bedroom.

A block and a half farther down the street was Mamie's house. Mamie lived there with her mother, Aunt Sophie, and several older brothers and sisters.

Pauline slowed down her car before she could see the house, and by the time she had reached it she had only to coast to a stop and to jump out on the sandy sidewalk. Mamie's house looked very much like most of the other houses in the Negro Quarter, but Pauline had seen it once before, and she needed only to recognize the ivy-trellised porch to tell her that it was the place where Mamie lived.

Several colored people were standing on the sidewalk, leaning against the whitewashed picket fence. None of them knew her, and Pauline did not stop to speak. She ran through the gate, up the steps, and to the open door. She knocked on the door as rapidly as she could. She could not wait much longer. John would be coming home from the mills at four o'clock, and it was past three o'clock then. There was not a minute to lose. She had to hurry.

Someone in the rear of the house opened a door and closed it. The delay made Pauline frantic. She took

several steps into the hall, listening for somebody to answer her knocking.

Pauline was in the center of the hall when Mamie opened a bedroom door and came out.

"Why! Miss Pauline!" Mamie said, astonished. "What's the matter, Miss Pauline?"

"Mamie, I came to ask——"

She stopped in the midst of her questioning and could go no further. Mamie had crossed the hall and was standing a few feet from her. Pauline sat down in a chair and looked at Mamie. Her heart was beating madly, and her head throbbed until she had to hold her hands over her face to ease the pain.

"Miss Pauline, ask me what? What's happened to you, Miss Pauline? You look scared, Miss Pauline."

Pauline opened her eyes slowly and looked at Mamie. She saw now exactly what John must have seen when he saw Mamie for the first time nearly two weeks before. She could see that Mamie was young and slender, that her hair was straight and glistening, and that her mixed blood had given her a kind of sensuous beauty that no white girl could ever possess. She saw that Mamie's legs were long and slender, and that Mamie was full-breasted. It was only then that she fully realized what John had meant when he asked her if Mamie were a good Negress. She could answer him now. She knew what to tell John the next time he asked her that about one of the colored servants.

"Mamie, I came to ask if you know——"

The door behind Mamie had been left open, and she looked into the bedroom for the first time. The sunshine came into the room, and a light breeze whipped the white curtains. The bedroom dresser was in full view.

Without waiting to finish what she was about to say, Pauline jumped from the chair and ran into Mamie's room. There on the dresser, just as it had sat on her own dressing-table, was John's silver-framed photograph. She snatched the picture in her arms and ran back to Mamie.

"What made you—why—when did you take it—what did you do it for, Mamie!"

Mamie smiled. She did not try to run away, nor did she attempt to defend herself. She smiled.

Pauline leaned against the wall, hugging the silver-framed photograph to her breast. Her head had stopped throbbing, but she felt too weak to stand any longer. Just in time, Mamie ran and brought the chair to her mistress.

Outside in the backyard a group of Negroes were talking, and, as suddenly as she had first heard their voices, they began to laugh. They were not laughing about something that was humorous. That would be another kind of laughter; white-folks' laughing, Aunt Sophie called it. The laughter that now came from their throats was different from any other expression of emotion Pauline had ever heard. They were not laughing at

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anything nor with anyone; they were laughing as only Negroes can laugh about nothing.

Pauline did not know how long she had been there in Mamie's house when she opened her eyes. She felt as though she had been in a deep sleep for hours. The laughter in the backyard had stopped, but echoes of it rolled in her head, just as the smile on Mamie's face had been only the beginning. She knew then that she could never forget what she had seen and heard in a Negro's house. She knew she would never be able to explain it to John, nor would she ever be able to explain the smile on Mamie's face, and the laughter in Aunt Sophie's backyard.

The silence in the house frightened her, and she realized how late it was in the afternoon. Pauline knew that John was at home wondering where she and the children were. She jumped to her feet unsteadily and ran through the doorway. Mamie ran beside her, holding her arm and supporting her with her other arm around her waist. They got into the car and sped homeward, with Mamie on the rear seat beside Jay and Claire.

John was standing on the porch when she turned into the driveway from the boulevard. She stopped the car and ran to him.

"Where have you been?" he asked, kissing her.

"Hold me tight, John! Hold me till it hurts!"

For several minutes she lay in his arms, her eyes

closed, and her body trembling. It was only when he put his hand under her chin and raised her head that she could look into his eyes.

"Why is Mamie here this afternoon, Pauline?" he asked her. "I thought this was her day off."

"It was her day off, John, but I couldn't get along without her. I went to her house and brought her back."

She knew the question that he had asked dozens of times was about to be asked of her again. She knew the question was coming, because he had always asked it of her. While she waited, she lowered her head again, tightening her arms around his neck, and closed her eyes tightly.

"Are you sure that we wish to keep Mamie?" he asked her. "Pauline, is she a good Ncgress?"

"Yes, John," she said, her body relaxing in his arms. "Mamie is a good girl."

Yellow Girl

NELL stood at the kitchen window packing the basket of eggs. She arranged eleven white eggs carefully, placing the cottonseed hulls between them and under them so that none would be broken. The last one to be put into the basket was large and brown and a little soiled. She dipped it into the pan of soap and warm water and wiped it dry with a fresh dishtowel. Even then she was not pleased with the way it looked, because it was brown; all the other eggs in the basket were as white as September cotton bolls.

Behind her in the room, Myrtie was scouring the two frying-pans with soapy water and a cloth dipped in sand. Nell laid down the brown egg and called Myrtie.

"Here's another of those big brown eggs, Myrtie," she said, pointing at the egg. "Do you have any idea where they come from? Have you seen any strange hens in the yard? There must be a visiting hen laying eggs in the chicken house."

Myrtie laid down the frying-pan and came over to the little table by the window. She picked up the large brown egg and looked at it. The egg no longer looked brown. It was exactly the color of her hands. Nell looked at the egg again, wondering why in Myrtie's hands it had apparently changed color.

"Where do these brown eggs come from, Myrtie?" she asked. "There was one last week, and now today there's this. It was in the basket Willis brought in from the chicken house, but he said he forgot to notice which nest he took it from."

Myrtie turned the egg over in her hands, feeling the weight of it and measuring its enormous circumference with her fingers.

"Don't ask me, Miss Nell," Myrtie said, staring at the egg. "I've never seen a flock of Leghorns yet, though, that didn't lay a few brown eggs, sometime or other. Looks like it just can't be helped."

"What do you mean, Myrtie? What on earth are you talking about? Of course, Leghorns lay white eggs; this is a brown egg."

"I'm not saying the Leghorns lay them, Miss Nell, and I'm not saying they don't. Those old Buff Orpingtons and Plymouth Rocks and Domineckers lay funny-looking eggs, too, sometimes. I wouldn't take-on so much about finding one measly brown egg, though. I've never seen anybody yet, white or colored, who knew how such things happen. But I wouldn't worry about it, Miss Nell. Brown eggs are just as good as white eggs, to my way of tasting."

Nell turned her back on Myrtie and looked out the window until the girl had returned to the other side of the kitchen. Nell disliked to talk to Myrtie, because Myrtie pretended never to know the truth about any-

thing. Even if she did know, she would invariably evade a straight-forward answer. Myrtie would begin talking, and talk about everything under the sun from morning to night, but she would never answer a question that she could evade. Nell always forgave her, though; she knew Myrtie was not consciously evading the truth. There was scarcely a colored person she had ever seen who would not talk the same way.

While the girl was scouring the pans, Nell picked up the egg again and looked at it closely. Mrs. Farrington had a flock of Dominique chickens, and she gathered in her chicken house eggs of all sizes, shapes, and colors. But that was to be expected, Mrs. Farrington had said, because she had two old roosters that were of no known name or breed. Nell had told Mrs. Farrington that some of her Dominiques were mixed-bred, and consequently they produced eggs of varying sizes, shapes, and colors; but Mrs. Farrington continued to lay all the blame on her two roosters, because, she said, they were a mixture of all breeds.

Once more Nell dipped the brown egg into the pan of water and wiped it with the fresh dishtowel, but the egg remained as brown as it was at first. The egg was clean by then, but soap and water would not alter its size or change its color. It was a brown egg, and it would remain brown. Nell gave up, finally; she realized that she could never change it in any way. If she had had another egg to put into the basket in its place, she

would have laid it aside and substituted a white one; but she only had a dozen, counting the brown one, and she wished to have enough to make an even exchange with Mrs. Farrington when she went over after some peas.

Before she finally placed the egg in the basket with the others she glanced out the window to see where Willis was. He was sitting in the crib door shelling red seed corn into an old wooden lard pail.

"I'm going over to Mrs. Farrington's now to exchange for some peas," she told Myrtie. "Keep the fire going good, and put on a pan of water to boil. I'll be back in a little while."

She turned around and looked at Myrtie.

"Suppose you mash the potatoes today, for a change, Myrtie. Mr. Willis likes them that way."

"Are you going to take that big egg, Miss Nell?" Myrtie asked, looking down at it in the basket with the eleven white Leghorns.

"Certainly," she said. "Why?"

"Mrs. Farrington will be surprised to see it in with all those white ones, won't she, Miss Nell?"

"Well, what if she does see it?" Nell asked impatiently.

"Nothing, Miss Nell," Myrtie said. "But she might want to know where it came from. She knows we've got Leghorn hens, and she might think one of her Dominickers laid it."

"I can't help that," Nell said, turning away. "And, besides, she should keep her Dominiques at home if she

doesn't wish them to lay eggs in somebody else's chicken house."

"That's right, Miss Nell," Myrtie said. "She sure ought to do that. She ought to keep her Domineckers at home."

Nell was annoyed by the girl's comments. It was none of Myrtie's business, anyway. Myrtie was getting to be impertinent, and she was forgetting that she was a hired servant in the house. Nell left the kitchen determined to treat Myrtie more coldly after that. She could not allow a colored cook to tell her what to do and what not to do.

Willis was sitting in the crib door shelling the red seed corn. He glanced up when Nell came down the back steps, and looked at her. He stopped shelling corn for a moment to wipe away the white flakes of husk that clung to his eyes.

"I'm going over to Mrs. Farrington's now and exchange a basket of eggs for some green peas, Willis," she said. "I'll not be gone long."

"Maybe she won't swap with you today," Willis said. He stopped and looked up at her through the thin cloud of flying husk that hovered around him. "How do you know she will want to take eggs for peas today, Nell?"

"Don't be foolish, Willis," she said, smiling at him; "why wouldn't she take eggs in exchange today?"

"She might get to wondering where that big brown egg came from," he said, laughing. "She might think it is an egg one of her hens laid."

Nell stopped, but she did not turn around. She waited, looking towards the house.

"You're as bad as Myrtie, Willis."

"In which way is that?"

The moment he spoke, she turned quickly and looked at him. He was bending over to pick up an ear of seed corn.

"I didn't mean to say that, Willis. Please forget what I said. I didn't mean anything like that."

"Like what?"

"Nothing," she said, relieved. "It wasn't anything; I've even forgotten what it was I said. Good-by."

"Good-by," he said, looking after her, wondering.

Nell turned and walked quickly out of the yard and went around the corner of the house towards the road. The Farrington house was half a mile away, but by taking the path through the cotton field it was two or three hundred yards nearer. She crossed the road and entered the field, walking quickly along the path with the basket of eggs on her arm.

Halfway to the Farringtons' Nell turned around and looked back to see if Willis was still sitting in the crib door shelling seed corn. She did not know why she stopped and looked back, but even though she could not see him there or anywhere else in the yard, she went on towards the Farringtons' without thinking of Willis again.

Mrs. Farrington was sitting on the back porch peeling turnips when Nell turned the corner of the house

and walked across the yard. There was a bucket of turnips beside Mrs. Farrington's rockingchair, and long purple peelings were lying scattered on the porch floor around her, twisted into shapes like apple peelings when they were tossed over the shoulder. Nell ran up the steps and picked up the longest peeling she could find; she picked up the peeling even before she spoke to Mrs. Farrington.

"Sakes alive, Nell," Mrs. Farrington said; "why are you throwing turnip peelings over your shoulder? Doesn't that good-for-nothing husband of yours love you any more?"

Nell dropped the turnip peeling, and, picking it up again, tore it into short pieces and threw them into the bucket. She blushed and sat down in the chair beside Mrs. Farrington.

"Of course, he loves me," Nell said. "I suppose I did that so many times when I was a little girl that I still have the habit."

"You mean it's because you haven't grown up yet, Nell," the woman said, chuckling to herself. "I used to be just like that myself; but, sakes alive, it doesn't last always, girl."

Both of them laughed, and looked away, one from the other. Over across the cotton field a cloud of white dust hung close to the earth. Mr. Farrington and the colored men were planting cotton, and the earth was so dry it rose up in the air when it was disturbed by the mules' hooves and the cotton planters. There was no

wind to carry the dust away, and it hung over the men and mules, hiding them from sight.

Presently Mrs. Farrington dropped a peeled turnip into the pan and folded her hands in her lap. She looked at Nell, noting her neatly combed hair and her clean gingham frock and white hands. Mrs. Farrington turned away again after that and gazed once more at the cloud of dust where her husband was at work.

"Maybe you and Willis will always be like that," she said. "Seems like you and Willis are still in love with each other. As long as he stays at home where he belongs and doesn't run off at night, it's a pretty sure sign he isn't getting ready to chase after another woman. Sakes alive, men can't always be depended upon to stay at home at night, though; they go riding off when you are least looking for them to."

Nell sat up, startled by what Mrs. Farrington had said, terrified by the directness of her comments.

"Of course, Willis wouldn't do a thing like that," she said confidently. "I know he wouldn't. Willis wouldn't do a thing like that. That's impossible, Mrs. Farrington."

Mrs. Farrington glanced at Nell, and then once more she looked across the field where the planting was being done. The cloud of white dust followed the men and mules, covering them.

"Seems like men are always saying something about being compelled to go to Macon on business, and even up to Atlanta sometimes," she said, ignoring Nell. "And

then there are the times when they say they have to go to town at night. Seems like they are always going off to town at night."

Several Dominique hens came from under the porch and stopped in the yard to scratch the hard white sand. They scratched listlessly; they went through the motions of scratching as if they knew of nothing else to do. They bent their long necks and looked down at the chicken-scrawls they had made with their claws, and they walked away aimlessly, neither surprised nor angry at not having unearthed a worm to devour. One of them began singing in the heat, drooping her wings until the tips of them dragged on the sand. The other hens paid no attention to her, strolling away without interest in the doleful music.

"You have pretty chickens, Mrs. Farrington," Nell said, watching the Dominiques stroll across the yard and sit down in the shaded dust holes as though they were nests.

"They're nothing but Domineckers," she said; "sakes alive, a body can't call them much of a breed, but they do get around to laying an egg or two once in a while."

Nell glanced down at the basket of eggs in her lap, covering the brown egg with her hand. She looked quickly at Mrs. Farrington to see if she had noticed what she had done.

"How are your Leghorns laying now, Nell?" she asked.

"Very well. Willis gathered sixteen eggs yesterday"

"My Domineckers seem to be taking a spell of resting. I only gathered two eggs yesterday, and that's not enough for a hungry man and a yard full of blacks. Sakes alive, we were saying only last night that we wished you would bring over some eggs in a day or two. And now, here you are with them. Half an hour's prayer couldn't have done better."

"I thought you might let me have some green peas for dinner," Nell said, lifting the basket and setting it on the floor. "Willis likes green peas at this time of year, and ours haven't begun to bear yet."

"You're as welcome to as many as you want," Mrs. Farrington said. "Just walk into the kitchen, Nell, and look on the big table and you'll find a bushel basket of them. Help yourself to all you think you and Willis will want. We've got more than we can use. Sakes alive, there'll be another bushel ready for picking tomorrow morning, too."

Nell went into the kitchen and placed the eleven Leghorn eggs and the big brown one in a pan. She filled the basket with green peas and came back to the porch, closing the screen noiselessly behind her.

"Sit down, Nell," Mrs. Farrington said, "and tell me what's been happening. Sakes alive, I sit here all day and never hear a word of what's going on."

"Why, I haven't heard of anything new," Nell said.

"What's Willis doing now?"

"He's getting ready to plant corn. He was shelling the seed when I left home. He should be ready to begin

planting this afternoon. The planter broke down yesterday, and he had to send to Macon for a new spoke-chain. It should be here in the mail today."

"Myrtie is still there to help you with the house, isn't she?"

"Yes, Myrtie is still there."

The hens lying in the dust holes in the shade of the sycamore tree stood up and flapped their wings violently, beating the dust from their feathers. They stretched, one leg after the other, and flapped their wings a second time. One of them spread her legs, bending her knees as if she were getting ready to squat on the ground, and scratched the hard white sand five or six times in quick succession. The other hens stood and watched her while she stretched her long neck and looked down at the marks she had made; and then, wiping her beak on her leg as one whets a knife-blade, she turned and waddled back across the yard and under the porch out of sight. The other hens followed her, singing in the heat.

"Couldn't you find a black woman to help you with the house?" Mrs. Farrington asked.

"A black woman?" Nell said. "Why, Myrtie is colored."

"She's colored all right," Mrs. Farrington said; "but, sakes alive, Nell, she isn't black. Myrtie is yellow."

"Well, that's all right, isn't it?" Nell asked. "Myrtie is yellow, and she is a fairly good cook. I don't know where I could find a better one for the pay."

"I reckon I'd heap rather have a black girl and a poor cook, than to have a yellow girl and the finest cook in the whole country."

Nell glanced quickly at Mrs. Farrington, but her head was turned, and she did not look at Nell.

There was a long silence between them until finally Nell felt that she must know what Mrs. Farrington was talking about.

One of the Dominiques suddenly appeared on the bottom step. She came hopping up to the porch, a step at a time. When she reached the last one, Mrs. Farrington said, "Shoo!" The hen flew to the yard and went back under the porch.

"You don't mean——"

Mrs. Farrington began rocking slowly, backward and forward. She gazed steadily across the field where her husband was planting cotton with the colored men.

"You don't mean that Willis and a nigger——"

One of the roosters strutted across the yard, his eye first upon the hens under the porch and next upon the two women, and stopped midway in the yard to stand and fix his eye upon Mrs. Farrington and Nell. He stood jerking his head from side to side, his hanging scarlet comb blinding his left eye, while he listened to the squeaking of Mrs. Farrington's chair. After a while he continued across the yard and went out of sight behind the smokehouse.

"Mrs. Farrington, Willis wouldn't do anything like that!" Nell cried excitedly.

"Like what?" Mrs. Farrington asked. "Sakes alive, Nell, I didn't say he would do anything."

"I know you didn't say it, Mrs. Farrington, but I thought you said it. I couldn't help thinking that you did say it."

"Well, that's different," she replied, much relieved. "I wouldn't want you to go telling Willis I did say it. Menfolks never understand what a woman means, anyway, and when they are told that a woman says something about them, they sometimes fly off the handle something awful."

Nell got up and stood beside the chair. She wished she might run down the steps and along the path towards home without another second's delay, but she knew she could not jump up and leave Mrs. Farrington like that, after what had been said. She would have to pretend that she was not in such a great hurry to get home.

"You're not going so soon, are you, Nell? Why, sakes alive, it seems like you only got here two or three minutes ago, Nell."

"I know," she said, "but it's getting late, and I've got to go home and get these peas ready for dinner. I'll be back to see you soon."

She walked slowly down the steps. Mrs. Farrington got up and followed her across the hard yard. When they reached the beginning of the path that led across the field, Mrs. Farrington stopped. She never went any farther than that.

"I'm afraid I must hurry home now and hull the peas in time for dinner," Nell said, backing down the path. "I'll be back again in a few days, Mrs. Farrington. Thank you so much for the peas. Willis has wanted some for the past week or longer."

"It's as fair an exchange as I can offer for the Leghorn eggs," she said, laughing. "Because if there's anything I like better than those white Leghorn eggs, I don't know what it is. I get so tired of eating my old Domineckers' brown eggs I sometimes say I hope I may never see another one. Maybe I'll be asking you for a setting of them some day soon."

"Good-by," Nell said, backing farther and farther away. She turned and walked several steps. "I'll bring you another basket soon, Mrs. Farrington."

It seemed as if she would never reach the house, even though it was only half a mile away. She could not run, because Mrs. Farrington was in the yard behind her watching, and she could not walk slowly, because she had to get home as soon as possible. She walked with her eyes on the path in front of her, forcing herself to keep from looking up at the house. She knew that if she did raise her eyes and look at it, she would never be able to keep herself from running. If she did that, Mrs. Farrington would see her.

It was not until she had at last reached the end of the path that she was able to look backward. Mrs. Farrington had left her yard, and Nell ran across the road and around to the back of the house.

Willis was nowhere within sight. She looked first at the crib where she had hoped she would find him, but he was not there and the crib door was closed and locked. She looked down at the barn, but he was not there, either. When she glanced hastily over the fields, she was still unable to see him anywhere.

She stopped at the bottom step on the back porch. There was no sound within the house that she could hear, and not even the sound of Myrtie's foot-steps reached her ears. The place seemed to be entirely deserted, and yet she knew that could not be, because only half an hour before when she left to go to Mrs. Farrington's to exchange eggs, Willis was sitting in the crib door shelling seed corn, and Myrtie was in the kitchen scouring the two frying-pans.

Nell's hands went out and searched for the railing that led up the porch steps. Her hands could not find it, and her eyes would not let her see it.

The thought of Mrs. Farrington came back to her again and again. Mrs. Farrington, sitting on her own back porch, talking. Mrs. Farrington, sitting in her rockingchair, looking. Mrs. Farrington, peeling purple-top turnips, talking about yellow girls.

Nell felt deathly sick. She felt as if she had been stricken with an illness that squeezed the core of her body. Deep down within herself, she was deathly ill. A pain that began by piercing her skull struck downward and downward until it became motionless in her stomach. It remained there, gnawing and biting, eating the

organs of her body and drinking the flow of her blood. She sank limp and helpless upon the back porch steps. Although she did not know where she was, she could still see Mrs. Farrington. Mrs. Farrington, in her rockingchair, looking. Mrs. Farrington, peeling purple-top turnips, talking about yellow girls.

Nell did not know how much later it was when she opened her eyes. The day was the color of the red seed corn Willis had been shelling when she last saw him sitting in the crib door, and it swam in a sea so wide that she almost cried out in fear when she saw it. Slowly she remembered how she had come to be where she was. She got to her feet weakly, holding to the railing for support.

Running up the steps and across the porch, she flung open the screen door and went into the kitchen. Myrtie was standing beside the table mashing the boiled Irish potatoes with a long fork that had seven tines. Myrtie looked up when Nell ran in, but she did not have an opportunity to speak. Nell ran headlong through the diningroom and on into the front room. Myrtie looked surprised to see her running.

Nell paused a moment in the doorway, looking at Willis, at the room, at the daybed, at the floor, at the rugs, at the open door that led into their room. She stood looking at everything she could see. She looked at the pillows on the daybed, at the rugs on the floor, at the chairs against the wall, at the counterpane on their bed. Remembering, she looked at the carpet in their

room. Willis sat in front of her reading *The Macon Telegraph* that had just come in the mail, and he was calmly smoking his pipe. She glanced once more at the daybed, at the pillows arranged upon it, and at the rug in front of it. Running, she went to their room and ran her hands over the counterpane of the bed. She picked up the pillows, feeling them, and laid them down again. She ran back into the other room where Willis was.

Willis looked up at her.

Nell ran and fell on her knees in front of him, forcing her body between his legs and locking her arms around him. She pressed her feverish face against his cool cheeks and closed her eyes tightly. She forced herself tightly to him, holding him with all her might.

"Did Mrs. Farrington exchange with you?" he asked. "I'll bet a pretty that she had something to say about that big brown egg in a basketful of Leghorns."

Nell felt her body shake convulsively, as if she were shivering with cold. She knew she had no control over it now.

"Look here," he said, throwing aside *The Telegraph* and lifting her head and looking into her eyes. "I know where that brown egg came from now. I remember all about it. There was one of Mrs. Farrington's old Dominecker hens over here yesterday morning. I saw her scratching in the yard, and she acted like she didn't give a cuss whether she clawed up a worm or not. She would scratch a while and then walk off without even looking to see if she had turned up a worm."

Nell felt herself shaking again, but she did not attempt to control herself. If she could only lie there close to Willis with her arms around him, she did not care how much she shivered. As long as she was there, she had Willis; when she got up and walked out of the room, she would never again be that certain.

August Afternoon

VIC GLOVER awoke with the noon-day heat ringing in his ears. He had been asleep for only half an hour, and he was getting ready to turn over and go back to sleep when he opened his eyes for a moment and saw Hubert's black head over the top of his bare toes. He stretched his eyelids and held them open as long as he could.

Hubert was standing in the yard, at the edge of the porch, with a pine cone in his hand.

Vic cursed him.

The colored man once more raked the cone over the tops of Vic's toes, and stepped back out of reach.

"What do you mean by standing there tickling me with that dad-burned cone?" Vic shouted at Hubert. "Is that all you can find to do? Why don't you get out in that field and do something to those boll-weevils? They're going to eat up every boll of cotton on the place if you don't stop them."

"I surely hated to wake you up, Mr. Vic," Hubert said, "but there's a white man out here looking for something. He won't say what he's looking for, but he's hanging around waiting for it."

Vic sat up wide awake. He sat up on the quilt and pulled on his shoes without looking into the yard. The

white sand in the yard beat the glare of the sun directly into his eyes and he could see nothing beyond the edge of the porch. Hubert threw the pine cone under the porch and stepped aside.

"He must be looking for trouble," Vic said. "When they come around and don't say anything, and just sit and look, it's trouble they're looking for."

"There he is, Mr. Vic," Hubert said, nodding his head across the yard. "There he sits up against that wateroak tree."

Vic looked around for Willie. Willie was sitting on the top step at the other end of the porch, directly in front of the strange white man. She did not look at Vic.

"You ought to have better sense than to wake me up while I'm taking a nap. This is no time of the day to be up. I've got to get a little sleep every now and then."

"Boss," Hubert said, "I wouldn't wake you up at all, not at any time, but Miss Willie just sits there high up on the steps and that white man has been out there whittling on a little stick a pretty long time without saying anything. I've got scared about something happening when he whittles that little stick clear through, and it's just about whittled down to nothing now. That's why I waked you up, Mr. Vic. Ain't much left of that little whittling-stick."

Vic glanced again at Willie, and from her he turned to stare at the stranger sitting under the wateroak tree in his front yard.

The piece of wood had been shaved down to paper thinness.

"Boss," Hubert said, "we ain't aiming to have no trouble today, is we?"

"Which way did he come from?" Vic asked.

"I never did see him come, Mr. Vic. I just looked up, and there he was, sitting against that wateroak and whittling on that little stick. I reckon I must have been drowsy when he came, because when I opened my eyes, there he was."

Vic slid down over the quilt until his legs were hanging over the edge of the porch. Perspiration began to trickle down his neck as soon as he sat up.

"Ask him what he's after, Hubert."

"We ain't aiming to have no trouble today, is we, Mr. Vic?"

"Ask him what he wants around here, I said."

Hubert went almost halfway to the wateroak tree and stopped.

"Mr. Vic says what can he do for you, white-folks?"

The man said nothing. He did not even glance up from the little stick he was whittling.

Hubert came back to the porch, the whites of his eyes becoming larger with each step.

"What did he say?" Vic asked him.

"He ain't said nothing yet, Mr. Vic. He acts like he don't hear me at all. You'd better go talk to him, Mr. Vic. He won't give me no attention. Appears to me like he's just sitting there and looking at Miss Willie on the

high step. Maybe if you was to tell her to go in the house and shut the door, he might be persuaded to give some notice to what we say to him."

"Ain't no sense in sending her in the house," Vic said. "I can make him talk. Hand me that stillyard."

"Mr. Vic, I'm trying to tell you about Miss Willie. Miss Willie's been sitting there on that high step and he's been looking up at her a right long time, Mr. Vic. If you won't object to me saying so, Mr. Vic, I reckon I'd tell Miss Willie to go sit somewhere else, if I was you. Miss Willie ain't got much on today, Mr. Vic. Just only that outside dress, Mr. Vic. That's what I've been trying to tell you. I walked out there in the yard this while ago to see what he was looking at so much, and when I say Miss Willie ain't got much on today, I mean she's got on just only that outside dress, Mr. Vic. You can go look yourself and see if I'm lying to you, Mr. Vic."

"Hand me that stillyard, I said."

Hubert went to the end of the porch and brought the cotton steelyard to Vic. He stepped back out of the way.

"Boss," Hubert said, "we ain't aiming to have no trouble today, is we?"

Vic was getting ready to jump down into the yard when the man under the watroak reached into his pocket and pulled out another knife. It was about ten or eleven inches long, and both sides of the handle were covered with hairy cowhide. There was a spring-button

in one end. The man pushed the button with his thumb, and the blade sprang from the case. He began playing with both knives, throwing them up into the air and catching them on the backs of his hands.

Hubert moved to the other side of Vic.

"Mr. Vic," he said, "I ain't intending to mess in your business none, but it looks to me like you got yourself in for a peck of trouble when you went off and brought Miss Willie back here. It looks to me like she's got up for a city girl, more so than a country girl."

Vic cursed him.

"I'm telling you, Mr. Vic, a country girl won't sit on a high step in front of a man, not even when she's wearing something more than just only an outside dress. I walked out there and looked at Miss Willie, and, Mr. Vic, Miss Willie is as bare as a plucked chicken, except for one little place I saw."

"Shut up," Vic said, laving the steelyard down on the quilt beside him.

The man under the wateroak closed the blade of the small penknife and put it into his pocket. The big hairy cowhide knife he flipped into the air and caught it easily on the back of his hand.

"Mr. Vic," Hubert said, "you've been asleep all the time and you don't know like I do. Miss Willie has been sitting there on that high step a long time now, and he's got his pecker up. I know, Mr. Vic, because I went out there myself and looked."

Vic cursed him.

The man in the yard flipped the knife into the air and caught it behind his back.

"What's your name?" he asked Willie.

"Willie."

He flipped the knife again.

"What's yours?" she asked him.

"Floyd."

"Where are you from?"

"Carolina."

He flipped it higher than ever, catching it underhanded.

"What are you doing in Georgia?"

"Don't know," he said. "Just looking around."

Willie giggled, smiling at him.

Floyd got up and walked across the yard to the steps and sat down on the bottom one. He put his arms around his knees and looked up at Willie.

"You're not so bad looking," he said. "I've seen lots worse looking."

"You're not so bad yourself," Willie giggled, resting her arms on her knees and looking down at him.

"How about a kiss?"

"What would it be to you?"

"Not bad. I reckon I've had lots worse."

"Well, you can't get it sitting down there."

Floyd climbed the steps on his hands and feet and sat down on the next to the top step. He leaned against Willie, putting one arm around her waist and the other over her knees. Willie slid down the step beside him.

Floyd pulled her to him, making a sucking-sound with his lips.

"Boss," Hubert said, his lips twitching, "we ain't aiming to have no trouble today, is we?"

Vic cursed him.

Willie and Floyd moved down a step without loosening their embrace.

"Who is that yellow-headed sapsucker, anyhow?" Vic said. "I'll be dad-burned if he ain't got a lot of nerve—coming here and fooling with Willie."

"You wouldn't do nothing to cause trouble, would you, Mr. Vic? I surely don't want to have no trouble today, Mr. Vic."

Vic glanced at the eleven-inch knife Floyd had stuck into the step at his feet. It stood on its tip, twenty-two inches high, while the sun was reflected against the bright blade and made a streak of light on Floyd's pants-leg.

"Go over there and take that knife away from him and bring it to me," Vic said. "Don't be scared of him."

"Mr. Vic, I surely hate to disappoint you, but if you want that white-folk's knife, you'll just have to get it your own self. I don't aim to have myself all carved up with that thing. Mr. Vic, I surely can't accommodate you this time. If you want that white-folk's knife, you'll just be bound to get it your own self, Mr. Vic."

Vic cursed him.

Hubert backed away until he was at the end of the

porch. He kept looking behind him all the time, looking to be certain of the exact location of the sycamore stump that was between him and the pine grove on the other side of the cotton field.

Vic called to Hubert and told him to come back. Hubert came slowly around the corner of the porch and stood a few feet from the quilt where Vic was sitting. His lips quivered and the whites of his eyes grew larger. Vic mentioned for him to come closer, but he would not come an inch farther.

"How old are you?" Floyd asked Willie.

"Fifteen."

Floyd jerked the knife out of the wood and thrust it deeper into the same place.

"How old are you?" she asked him.

"About twenty-seven."

"Are you married?"

"Not now," he said. "How long have you been?"

"About three months," Willie said.

"How do you like it?"

"Pretty good so far."

"How about another kiss?"

"You've just had one."

"I'd like another one now."

"I ought not to let you kiss me again."

"Why not?"

"Men don't like girls who kiss too much."

"I'm not that kind."

"What kind are you?"

"I'd like to kiss you a lot."

"But after I let you do that, you'd go away."

"No, I won't. I'll stay for something else."

"What?"

"To get the rest of you."

"You might hurt me."

"It won't hurt."

"It might."

"Let's go inside for a drink and I'll show you."

"We'll have to go to the spring for fresh water."

"Where's the spring?"

"Just across the field in the grove."

"All right," Floyd said, standing up. "Let's go."

He bent down and pulled the knife out of the wood. Willie ran down the steps and across the yard. When Floyd saw that she was not going to wait for him, he ran after her, holding the knives in his pocket with one hand. She led him across the cotton field to the spring in the pine grove. Just before they got there, Floyd caught her by the arm and ran beside her the rest of the way.

"Boss," Hubert said, "we ain't aiming to have no trouble today, is we?"

Vic cursed him.

"I don't want to get messed up with a heap of trouble and maybe get my belly slit open with that big hairy knife. If you ain't got objections, I reckon I'll mosey on home now and cut a little fire-wood for the cook-stove."

"Come back here!" Vic said. "You stay where you are and stop making moves to go off."

"What is we aiming to do, Mr. Vic?"

Vic eased himself off the porch and walked across the yard to the wateroak. He looked down at the ground where Floyd had been sitting, and then he looked at the porch steps where Willie had been. The noon-day heat beat down through the thin leaves overhead and he could feel his mouth and throat burn with the hot air he breathed.

"Have you got a gun, Hubert?"

"No, sir, boss," Hubert said.

"Why haven't you?" he said. "Right when I need a gun, you haven't got it. Why don't you keep a gun?"

"Mr. Vic, I ain't got no use for a gun. I used to keep one to shoot rabbits and squirrels with, but I got to thinking one day, and I traded it off the first chance I got. I reckon it was a good thing I traded, too. If I had kept it, you'd be asking for it like you did just now."

Vic went back to the porch and picked up the steelyard and hammered the porch with it. After he had hit the porch four or five times, he dropped it and started out in the direction of the spring. He walked as far as the edge of the shade and stopped. He stood listening for a while.

Willie and Floyd could be heard down near the spring. Floyd said something to Willie, and Willie laughed loudly. There was silence again for several minutes, and then Willie laughed again. Vic could not

tell whether she was crying or laughing. He was getting ready to turn and go back to the porch when he heard her cry out. It sounded like a scream, but it was not exactly that; it sounded like a shriek, but it wasn't that, either; it sounded more like someone laughing and crying simultaneously in a high-pitched, excited voice.

"Where did Miss Willie come from, Mr. Vic?" Hubert asked. "Where did you bring her from?"

"Down below here a little way," he said.

Hubert listened to the sounds that were coming from the pine grove.

"Boss," he said after a little while, "it appears to me like you didn't go far enough away."

"I went far enough," Vic said. "If I had gone any farther, I'd have been in Florida."

The colored man hunched his shoulders forward several times while he smoothed the white sand with his broad-soled shoes.

"Mr. Vic, if I was you, the next time I'd surely go that far, maybe farther."

"What do you mean, the next time?"

"I was figuring that maybe you wouldn't be keeping her much longer than now, Mr. Vic."

Vic cursed him.

Hubert raised his head several times and attempted to see down into the pine grove over the top of the growing cotton.

"Shut up and mind your own business," Vic said. "I'm going to keep her till the cows come home. Where,

else do you reckon I'd find a better-looking girl than Willie?"

"Boss, I wasn't thinking of how she looks—I was thinking of how she acts. That white man came here and sat down and it wasn't no time before she had^h his pecker up."

"She acts that way because she ain't old enough yet to know who to fool with. She'll catch on in time."

Hubert followed Vic across the yard. While Vic went towards the porch, Hubert stopped and leaned against the wateroak where he could almost see over the cotton field into the pine grove. Vic went up on the porch and stretched out on the quilt. He took off his shoes and flung them aside.

"I surely God knowed something was going to happen when he whittled that stick down to nothing," Hubert was saying to himself. "White-folks take a long time to whittle a little piece of wood, but when they whittle it down to nothing, they're going to be up and doing before the time ain't long."

Presently Vic sat upright on the quilt.

"Listen here, Hubert——"

"Yes, sir, boss!"

"You keep your eye on that stillyerd so it will stay right where it is now, and when they come back up the path, you wake me up in a hurry."

• "Yes, sir, boss," Hubert said. "Are you aiming to take a little nap now?"

• "Yes, I am. And if you don't wake me up when they

come back, I'll break your neck for you when I do wake up."

Vic lay down again on the quilt and turned over on his side to shut out the blinding glare of the early afternoon sun that was reflected upon the porch from the hard white sand in the yard.

Hubert scratched his head and sat down against the wateroak, facing the path from the spring. He could hear Vic snoring on the porch above the sounds that came at intervals from the pine grove across the field. He sat staring down the path, drowsy, singing under his breath. It was a long time until sun-down.

Mama's Little Girl

"I'M afraid," Arlene whispered, closing her eyes tightly. "I am so afraid, honey."

In the next room, Miss McAllister lifted the heavy lid and rattled half a hod of dusty coke into the firebox. The cook-stove was already red-hot on top, and the heat from it sang in the stifling air.

Before replacing the lid on the stove, Miss McAllister walked over to the table by the window and picked up a piece of gauze that had been lying there on the white oilcloth ever since she had finished sterilizing the blue-and-white enameled pan. She carried the cloth to the stove and dropped it into the flame. There was a sizzling-sound, a leaping tongue of purple fire, a puff of blackish smoke, and the gauze had been incinerated.

Miss McAllister shook down the ashes for the third several time.

"I'm so afraid," Arlene said again, her lips trembling more than ever. "Honey, don't—don't let anything happen to me!"

"It will be all right," I said, looking away from the eyes that burned through me. "Nothing could ever happen to you, Arlene. He promised nothing would. Everything will have to be all right."

Her fingers stiffened.

"I told Mama we were going for a ride into the country this afternoon. I told her we would not be back in time for dinner tonight. I told Mama not to worry, because I would be with you."

The heat from the next room was swimming before my eyes. All the doors and windows had been closed tightly, and there was not a breath of fresh air anywhere. Overhead, beads of pitch dropped from the pine ceiling and fell on the bare floor at our feet.

"What did she say?" I asked Arlene. "Did she say anything?"

"She said that would be all right. She said she knew you would bring me home safely."

"What did you say?"

"What did I say then? Why, I've forgotten now. Though I suppose I told her we would be back early. Why?"

Miss McAllister came into the room and looked at us. She stood close to the other door, turning around to look at us. She was wearing a stiffly starched white skirt with broad straps over the shoulders, and white cotton stockings and white canvas shoes with flat heels. The blouse she was wearing was pink georgette, and it was so thin that I could see the brown mole on her skin just above her waist.

"Where is he now?" I asked her.

"He'll be here any minute now," Miss McAllister

said, looking at Arlene. "He phoned that he was on his way."

Arlene's fingers squeezed mine.

"You don't suppose he will be delayed, do you?" I asked. "Do you think there'll be anything to make him late? Will he get here in time?"

"Of course he will come," Miss McAllister said, smoothing the pink georgette over her breasts and laughing deeply within her chest when she looked at Arlene.

A bead of glistening brown pitch fell from the ceiling to the toe of Miss McAllister's right shoe, missing the tip of her nose by a hair's breadth and dropping between the hollow of her breasts. Somebody was coming up the squeaky stairs.

Arlene was about to whisper something to me when the door opened and Doctor Anderson came in. He paused a moment to look at us. He smiled at Arlene, waved his hand at me, and then turned to Miss McAllister. She closed the door, bolted it with the thumb-lock, and took Doctor Anderson's hat and hung it on the tree behind her. They walked into the next room, side by side, talking to each other.

Doctor Anderson wet his finger on his tongue and tapped the top of the stove with it. We could hear the sizzle in the room where we were.

"I'm crazy about your regulation blouse," Doctor Anderson said. "At the next meeting of the board, I'm

going to propose that we adopt your style of uniform for all the nurses at the hospital."

Miss McAllister unbuttoned his vest and helped him with his long white coat.

"I forgot to bring the other one with me today," she said. "I was in such a rush all morning that I didn't have time to look for a regulation blouse."

"How did you feel this morning? All right?"

"I had a little wobble in my walk for an hour or so. When I first got up, I felt like I was walking on stilts."

"My wife asked me what kind of a case I had last night. I told her it was an emergency call."

There was a quick step, a moment's silence, and an almost inaudible sucking of lips.

Doctor Anderson stepped into the doorway.

"All right, Miss—" he said. "We're ready now."

Arlene turned her face from him and buried her head against me.

"I'm afraid, honey," she whispered. "I'm so afraid."

I could not release her, and after a while Doctor Anderson came over and pulled us apart. He said something to Miss McAllister that I did not hear.

"Kiss me just once more, honey, and I'll not be afraid to go," Arlene said, holding her lips up to mine. "I'll not be afraid to go."

Doctor Anderson stepped back a moment. He waited for several minutes, fingering his stethoscope.

"All right, Miss—" he said. "We're ready now."

"I'm not afraid any longer," Arlene said, standing.

Doctor Anderson took her by the arm and led her into the next room. I saw them enter the kitchen and I could hear Miss McAllister shaking down the ashes in the red-hot cook-stove for the fourth several time. It was so hot by then that the air in both rooms smelled scorched.

After a few minutes, Doctor Anderson came to the door. His sleeves were rolled above his elbows and his face and hands were so inflamed by the heat in the kitchen that the skin looked as though it had been smeared with blood.

He beckoned to me.

"You may come in for just a moment, Mr. ——" he said. "But please do not touch anything on the table with your hands or body."

He stepped back and I walked unsteadily into the room with them. Miss McAllister had opened a can of ether, and the odor had already permeated the air. It made me a little sick to smell it, even though the odor was still faint.

"I'm not afraid at all now," Arlene said, smiling up at me from the white oilcloth on the table top. "Kiss me just once more, and I'll be all right, honey."

Miss McAllister stepped over to the table and drew the sheet over Arlene, folding back the hem at her throat. When she turned to go, she looked at the three of us through tight lips.

Doctor Anderson stepped over to the table and drew the sheet from Arlene, jerking it off in a single motion,

and throwing it on a chair beside the cook-stove. He came back and stood on the other side of the table looking down at Arlene.

I kissed her until Doctor Anderson laid his hand on my back and pulled me away from her. Her face was bloodless.

"That will be too much excitement for the patient, Mr. ——" he said, pushing me away.

Miss McAllister was standing impatiently beside me with the ether cone in her hands. She caught Doctor Anderson's eyes and nodded her head in the direction of the door. He turned me around and pushed me towards the other room.

When I looked back at Arlene and saw her for the last time, she raised her head just a little and said something. I stopped and waited until she could repeat what I had not heard.

"Please call up Mama," she said, smiling, "and tell her I'll not be home tonight."

"I will, Arlene," I promised, starting back into the room where she lay. "I'll do anything in the world for you, Arlene."

Miss McAllister tapped her foot impatiently while she waited for Doctor Anderson to send me out.

"That's sweet of you to say that, honey—and don't forget to call up Mama and tell her I'll not be home tonight. And—honey, if—if I never see you again—you will always love me, won't you—you'll always remember me, won't you?"

Before I could run to her, Doctor Anderson had grabbed me by the arms and had pushed me into the next room. Miss McAllister ran and shut the door between us, bolting it with the thumb-lock. Already the sickening odor of ether had entered that room, and I ran to the other door and down the stairs for fresh air.

On the front porch the old man was still sitting there smoking his pipe. The tobacco had burned out, but he puffed on the stem just as though it were lit. He glanced up when I ran out on the porch, and looked at me over the rim of his spectacles.

"I can't remember that I've ever seen your face before, son," he said, squinting at me. "When did you move in?"

My head was swimming and I could not understand anything he was saying. I leaned against the rooms-for-rent sign on the wall, closing my eyes as I felt myself slide slowly downward to the porch floor.

The First Autumn

THEY sat on the lawn looking up at the fluttering leaves on the old maples. He was beside the wagon with his arm over the red wooden body; she was on the other side, sitting with her legs crossed under her and with her hands folded in her lap.

"That is the oldest tree over there," Elizabeth said, pointing across the lawn. "I know it's the oldest, because it's the one where the squirrels live."

"But that's not why it is the oldest, silly," Robert said. "It's the oldest because the leaves stay green the longest. The little trees turn red first."

A week ago all the trees were as green as the newly mown lawn, and then all of a sudden they had begun to turn. The grove of maples on the hill was orange and gold, the younger trees were the deeper color; and in the yard the old maples that had been there scores of years were turning yellow and purple. In a short while the leaves would begin to twirl and spin on the branches when the breezes blew, and then they would twist themselves off and come fluttering down. After that the grass would die, the flowers would shrivel, and the hills and fields would be a deep dark brown until the first snow fell.

"The sky was raining paint last night while we slept,"

Elizabeth said. "It rained a pot of paint on every tree."

"Daddy says it is the end of summer. He said that the trees turn red and orange and yellow every year when summer is over."

"I didn't see it last year."

"But Daddy said that last year all the trees were colored. They were yellow for a while, and then all of them were red. When the leaves turn red, that's when they are ready to fall almost any minute. That's because they are dead."

The front door opened. Robert dropped the wagon tongue and raced to the porch.

"Here's Daddy! Here's Daddy! Daddy's come out to play!"

Elizabeth ran after him. They clambered up on the porch steps as fast as they could.

"Now what?" Daddy said.

"Play!" said Robert, jumping up and down, swinging on his arm. "We're going to play!"

"Is this the end of the week, Daddy?" Elizabeth asked. "Are you going to stay two whole days now?"

"It's the end of the week. No more city for two whole days."

"Let's play," Robert said, pulling him down the steps. "Let's play everything!"

"We are tired of playing bear, aren't we?" Daddy asked. "We played bear last week-end. What'll we play this week?"

"Bear!" Robert cried. "Let's play bear again. It's more fun than anything else."

"I've just thought of a new game to play," Daddy said. "How would you like to play horse, Robert?"

"Oh, let's play bear first of all," Elizabeth begged, pulling him across the lawn. "Just for a little while, Daddy, and then we can play all the other games."

"All right, then," Daddy said. "Who's going to be the great big black bear this time?"

"You are!" Robert said. "You're always the bear, Daddy. Let's hear you growl!"

"Woof!" Daddy said, dropping down on his hands and knees. "Woof! Woof! Woof!"

"Oh, don't scare me so!" Elizabeth cried, crawling backward. "Please don't scare me so! I'm awfully scared of bears!"

"Woof! Woof! Woof!" Daddy said, pawing the lawn and waddling after her.

"You're missing me!" Robert said. "Here I am. Growl some at me."

"Woof! Woof! Woof!"

"Look! Here are some berries for the big black bear," Elizabeth said, holding out a handful of grass. "Would you like to have some berries?"

"Woof!" Daddy said, licking the short blades of grass from her hand. "Woof!"

"I'm going to ride the bear!" Robert cried. "Look at me! I'm going to ride the big black bear's back. I'm not afraid!"

Robert ran and climbed on Daddy's back, whipping the bear with a maple twig to make him get-up.

"Now, let's play horse," Daddy said. "This is a new game. We've never played horse before, have we, Elizabeth?"

"Oh, let's do!" she said. "Hurry, Robert! Get down off the bear's back so we can all play horse. It's going to be lots of fun, isn't it, Daddy?"

"It certainly is," said Daddy. "But who is going to be the horse?"

"Oh, you are!" Elizabeth cried. "You be the horse."

"All right. I'm the horse. Now look out! Here comes the wild white horse!"

"What's the horse going to do?" Robert asked.

"The horse would like some sugar," Daddy said. "The horse likes sugar better than anything else. He likes salt sometimes, but he would rather have sugar now. He hasn't had any sugar for a long time."

"Where's the horse going to get sugar?" Elizabeth asked. "We haven't any out here."

"Neigh! Neigh! Neigh!" Daddy said, galloping around in a circle on his hands and feet.

"The horse is looking for sugar," Robert said. "Look out! Don't let the wild horse kick you!"

Daddy stopped, twisted his head from side to side and raised his foot high into the air behind him.

"Look out!" Robert cried. "The horse is getting ready to kick!"

Daddy held his foot high up behind him a moment,

and kicked. He kicked so hard it made his shoe come tumbling off.

"The horse kicked his shoe off!" Elizabeth said. "Let's be careful, because the horse is angry with us for not giving him some sugar. Oh, where will we find some sugar!"

"I'm not afraid of the horse," Robert said. "Watch me! I'm going to ride him!"

"He'll throw you off," said Elizabeth. "You'd better wait until he gets some sugar first."

"Watch me! This is the way to catch a wild horse and ride him away!"

"Neigh! Neigh! Neigh!" Daddy said, galloping off. He stopped and kicked high into the air with his other foot. That shoe did not come off as the other one had.

"Here I go!" Robert said. "Watch me ride the wild horse all around the pasture!"

Daddy stood still until Robert had climbed on his back. Then he shook his head from side to side, snorted, and pawed the lawn.

"Let me ride, too," Elizabeth begged. "I'd like to ride the wild horse."

She climbed on Daddy's back behind Robert and held Robert around the waist so she would not be thrown off when the horse bucked and reared.

"What are you getting down flat on the ground for, Daddy?" Robert asked. "We are all on. You may get up now, Daddy. Make the wild horse snort and buck!"

Daddy lay down flat on the lawn. Elizabeth got off,

but Robert took a maple tree twig and tried to make the horse get-up.

"The horse won't get-up," Robert said. "He wants to lie down."

"Why don't you play horse any more, Daddy?" Elizabeth asked. "If you are tired of playing horse, let's play another game. I know a good one called 'Hunting the Kitty.' Don't you wish to play that with us? It's lots of fun, Daddy."

Robert got up and walked towards the porch. He stopped and looked back at Daddy and Elizabeth on the lawn.

"I'm going to tell Mother you won't play with us any more, Daddy," he said. "She'll come out and make you play."

He ran into the house. Elizabeth moved closer to Daddy and began searching for four-leaf clovers in the grass.

The red leaves on the maples in the yard were falling to the lawn. When a sudden gust of wind blew, the leaves spun and twirled on their stems, fluttering to the ground like small pieces of torn red paper. Over on the hill the orange and gold trees rustled and bowed in the wind, shaking themselves until the under-side of the leaves turned outward to the sun.

Mother and Robert came out the front door and walked across the lawn. Mother put her finger over her lips so that no one would make a sound. She came closer, tiptoeing softly on the smooth lawn, trying not

to make any noise. Robert held her by the hand, holding his finger over his lips, too. Elizabeth put her hand over her mouth, nodding her head up and down, and opening her eyes wider and wider. In another moment they could all scare Daddy, because he did not know that Mother and Robert were there.

When Mother got almost in front of him, she took her finger from her lips and nodded at Robert and Elizabeth. He and Elizabeth were all but bursting with excitement.

"Boo!" Mother cried, falling down beside Daddy on the grass.

"Boo! Daddy!" Robert said.

"Boo!" said Elizabeth, jumping up and down.

Mother looked down at Daddy, waiting for him to raise his head and smile at her. She waited another moment and bent closer.

A small black ant was crawling over his nose. On the back of his white shirt a big green grasshopper sat with his long legs all ready to spring.

"Look at the funny grasshopper," Robert said, touching it with a blade of grass. "He's resting on Daddy's shirt. Look at him jump so high!"

"Shhh!" Mother said, putting her finger over her lips again. "Don't make any sounds. Daddy is fast asleep."

"Then how can we play, if Daddy isn't going to be the wild horse?" Elizabeth asked, pouting.

"Playing horse isn't much fun," Robert said. "I

would like to play something else when Daddy wakes up."

Mother sat down close to Daddy, taking one of his hands in hers. She held his hand a moment, and dropped it.

"What's the matter?" Elizabeth asked, clutching Mother's skirt. "Why did you scream, Mother?"

Mother was biting her lips and looking down at Daddy's white shirt where the big grasshopper had been sitting. A maroon maple leaf fluttered down, spinning over and over. It fell on Daddy's shirt and lay there.

"Will Daddy play with us again when he wakes up?" Robert asked. "We had almost finished playing horse, and there're some other games we wish to play, too."

"Daddy kicked so hard while we were playing horse that his shoe came off," Elizabeth said. "Look! Here it is!"

She picked it up, and Mother took it from her and held it in both of her hands, pressing it against her breast. Her fingers moved over it as if she were trying to feel what it was without looking at it.

The little black ant on Daddy's nose crawled up to his forehead and stopped there to look at something.

"We must go into the house now," Mother said, taking Elizabeth and Robert by the hands. "I wish both of you to go to the playroom and stay there until I call you. Look at the pictures in your books, or build something with your blocks, but do not look out of the

window until I call you. Run along now, Robert and Elizabeth. Mother will be busy for a long time."

They went into the house and Mother waited at the bottom of the stairs while they were going up to the playroom. She leaned against the newel post, holding close to her breast the shoe that Daddy had kicked off when he was the wild horse.

"It's a shame to stay indoors when it's so nice out there," Robert said. "All the red leaves will soon be gone."

"Will you call us the minute Daddy wakes up, Mother?" Elizabeth asked. "Please do. We wish to finish playing horse—and we have some new games to play, too."

"Yes," Mother said, "I'll call you."

After-Image

I DON'T know how the thing came about. It just happened that way. One moment I was standing beside her with my hand on her arm, and the next moment she was gone. A thing like that can be an occurrence, an event, a tragedy, or merely the final act of living. I don't know what this was; but she was gone.

She had been standing beside me, her hands on the rail, looking out across the Sound. There was no mist in the air, and the stars were near and bright; but the lights on the shore seemed to be a long way off.

"They told me I could never see her again," she said. "Then they shut the door and left me alone on the porch. I couldn't stay there forever. I left."

But there is no sense in my trying to repeat what she said. I can't remember everything, and most of it was unspoken. She had not even started at the beginning. The first words she had said were: "I was nineteen when the baby was born." And when she spoke again, it was about something else. It would be foolish for me to try to arrange her sentences in any kind of order, and it would be impossible. Even if it were possible to take the words she uttered that night and arrange them in some kind of order, the things would have no meaning. A thousand things could be made of the words and sen-

tences, but there is no one who knows what the logical sequence should be. In the end, we could with just as much purpose shake several thousand words in a hat and put them together in the order in which they were drawn.

I am not trying to repeat the things she said. It would be impossible to do that. I did not even try to hear much of what was being said, and most of what I did hear was all but inaudible.

"The house they live in has two storeys and an attic. The roof has been covered with tin painted red. In the yard are three elm trees."

I heard her say that, but put those sentences after "I was nineteen when the baby was born," and almost everyone would suppose that she had given birth to a child in a house with two storeys and a tin roof painted red. And that in the yard were elm trees. But that is not true, because the baby was born in a hospital. That's why I am not going to repeat what she said, at least not much of it. Some would be inclined to believe one thing, and some another. But the fact is that nothing someone else would be inclined to believe is true. What actually happened was that she said several things to me and stood beside me at the rail. That's why I don't know how the thing came about.

She had told me everything there was to tell. That was all she wished to talk about. The baby had been taken away from her, and her husband had left her. "I have never been dishonest with him," she had said. "But

he was tired of me, and he wished to live with someone else. That was all right, if he wished to do that. I loved him, but if he wished to go, I did not wish to make him stay. I really wished him to go and be happy. But they had no right to take the baby. She was mine. I am her mother."

I am not going to tell a lie about this thing. A lie is told with words, and the words in this have nothing whatever to do with what I am telling.

The proper thing for me to have done was to offer to help her in some way, and to promise her that I would try to raise some money for a lawyer to take the matter to court. Or this or that. But I made no offer. I merely stood and looked at her, and waited to see what was going to happen next.

"The baby is mine," she said. "She is mine! I am her mother, and I have not been dishonest with him."

People were strolling past us, laughing and talking. There were three hundred people behind us.

"I'll never see the baby again. She will never see me. They will teach her that someone else is her mother. But she is my baby, and I'm her mother."

There is no reason why I should pretend not to be sentient about this. I have heard women many times before talk about their children, about their lovers, about nearly everything under the sun that women live for. It's nothing new to me. And yet, in a case like this, when a woman comes up to me and says, "He begged me to marry him so we could live together and have a baby,"

I never know what to say or to think. Usually I stand and look at her and wonder how such things happen. That was what she had said: "He begged me to marry him."

"This other woman he fell in love with knew some things I had never heard of. She made him happier than I could, and he wouldn't tell me what they were. If I had known, I would have given him everything she did. I could never find out what they were."

We were not at the rail then. We were in her cabin eating some sandwiches she had brought with her, and drinking ginger ale. Oh, the whole thing was mixed up. Nothing took place in logical order, and nothing had been said one moment that had any bearing on what was said the moment before. The whole thing was a hopeless cut-out puzzle with an unknown number of parts missing. It would never come out in a way that made sense. I knew that. I knew that even when the whole thing was over, when the puzzle was finished except for the missing pieces, that it would be unrecognizable. Neither I nor anyone else would know how the whole should appear.

She was on her way back home. At any rate, it had been her destination. But when she got there, there was nothing she could have done. She had no money for rent and food and clothes. She did not even know where she could find a job. When she reached home, she would have been forced to walk from house to house asking for something to eat and for some work to do. If she

had had her baby, she could have undertaken to do that. But alone, with no family to help her, and with nothing left to live for, it would have been more than she could have endured. There is a breaking point. There is a place which is the end. After that, going back is the only way left. She could not go back. They had shut the door in her face, and had told her not to come there again.

"I don't care what happens to me tonight," she said. "Nothing matters now. I want to forget everything for a few moments. If I could only be happy for a little while, I would be satisfied. I have never talked like this before, because this is the first time in my life I have ever thought of such things. I have always been honest with my husband. I did not deceive him. I have never been unfaithful. I have not even wished to be. I have never done anything that I knew he did not like for me to do. Now, I don't care what happens. I only want to be happy for a few short minutes. Perhaps I could get some liquor and drink until I am senseless. But that's foolish. I couldn't be happy that way. I would only be asleep. I want to feel happy, and to know that I am."

I'm not going to lie about this thing. I could make the whole thing a lie, perhaps, by pretending that I tried this way and that to comfort her. Perhaps I might have told her that if she stopped thinking about it so much and went to sleep that everything would be all right the next day. But I said nothing like that. I did

nothing of the kind. I put the empty ginger ale bottles on the floor, in the corner of the cabin so the roll and pitch of the ship wouldn't upset them, and at the same time looked at her while she tried to talk.

"This woman he loved drank a certain kind of liquor with him and then they lay down together. I would have been glad to do that for him, but it would not have been necessary to make him happy. My love was stronger than anything like that can be. I would have torn myself open for him."

When she first began talking like that, I didn't know what to do. She had given up all hope of ever seeing either her husband or her baby again, and she knew that what happened after that night would not concern her. And she knew there was a way to forget and to feel happy, even if it was so short in time. She must have known that when she began telling me that she wished to forget for a few moments.

"He used to come home, after being away for two or three weeks, and tell me to leave him alone. He never knew how much he hurt me, but I could stand it because I had my baby then. But there were times when I wanted him so much. No one will ever know how I loved him. I loved him and my baby more than my own life."

What in God's name could I have said? What could a man, accustomed to doing the things he wished to do, say to a woman who had told him that? How could I understand what she was talking about? How can a

man, running here and there as fancy strikes him, know how a woman feels when she is forced to live mute and alone?

Oh, the whole thing was a jumble. It was the framework of an image, indistinct and unbelievable. When she asked me what time it was, she knew and I knew that time did not matter. Time had nothing to do with who we were, what we were doing, and what we were talking about. The face of a clock is merely the reminder of the past. One o'clock, ten o'clock or five, it would still have been time for her to go in and see if the baby had tossed off the cover and to tuck her in for the night.

But why did my hands tremble, and why did my heart quiver? This thing was real. There she was, sitting before me, crying this moment and laughing the next. She had a ring on her finger. The woodwork creaked under the stress and strain of the sea and the engines. It was real. I could feel it with my hands. I could touch it, scratch it, mar it with the nails in my shoes.

"I went down to the dock and bought a ticket. I had to wait nearly half an hour because there was such a crowd ahead of me. It took a long time for me to get aboard."

How did all this happen? How did it come about that I, who had never seen her before and who would never see her again, went with her and sat down in front of her? There were other things to do. This was

not the only cabin on the ship. She was not the only person. It would be so easy to tell what might have happened, rather than to tell what actually did. It would be easier than doing this.

"Hurt me—ruin me—kill me!" she whispered. "Look! You won't have to suffer!"

A thousand lies could be told about the whole thing. I could say I said this-and-that; I could say I did this-that-and-the-other. A thousand things might have happened, but only one did. This only happened. This one thing. That's why I do not know how it came about. That's why I can't repeat, in logical sequence, what was said. Everything was in a hopeless jumble. This second she said one thing, and the next moment something else. Putting the two together made no sense.

I put my hand over her mouth. She had begun to scream. Screams such as I had never before heard pounded against my ears. The scratching at my face and shoulders I could partly endure and partly evade, but the screams had to be stopped. I tied a heavy bath towel over her mouth. What else could I have done? She lay there and scratched me and held me and tried to scream until her face was as discolored as a bruise. She had to scream. It mattered nothing to her that there were three hundred people on the boat. If three hundred people heard her, or if no one heard her, she did not care. If the door were battered down, showing us there, the blood from my face and shoulders dripping upon her white body, she did not care. But I tied

a heavy bath towel over her mouth. She tried to jerk it off, but I held it there. If she had torn it away and screamed, I could have forced it into her throat and choked her. She would have stopped breathing then. She wished me to kill her. She had said so. She had begged me to kill her. She had scratched the blood from my face and shoulders, begging me to kill her. But first she wished to be happy. She wished to feel the happiness within her body. She wished to forget herself in happiness. There was a way. We were both covered with my blood by then. It had dripped from my chest and smeared her face and body.

All that was before. Everything seemed to be before anything else. Everything had happened before anything else had. That was why it was such a hopeless jumble. Time, place, and events had neither a beginning nor an end. I actually do not know what the sequence of events was. I am only trying to tell about them. There is no possible way of placing them in the order of their origin. That's why the thing can't be told with any order. That's why I can't lie about what happened. They will have to be put down just as they are. The things she said will have to be put down as she said them. If she had spoken with order, things would perhaps be clear. And if nothing comes out right in the end, it will be because I tried to put the whole thing down with respect for her. She had said things and done things with no regard for the way they would look and sound when re-acted and repeated. She didn't care about

that. She wished to be happy, and to feel the happiness within herself, for a few moments.

She had said: "He wanted me to marry him. He begged me to do it. He cried like a baby when I said I wanted to wait a while longer. He cried like a baby. A great big strong man like him cried like a baby."

She had said: "We lived in a six-room house with a pump on the back porch. We had a collie puppy named Spot. Oh, we were so happy together, all the time, day and night. Don't look at me when I cry; I can't help it."

I don't know what I said. That is the truth. But what in God's name could I have said? She did not wish me to talk to her. Only to listen now.

"Oh, I loved him so! And we loved each other like nothing else in the world for nearly two years. Then one night he came home and said he was going to leave me. He told me about the other woman. He told me what she looked like and how she wore her clothes. He told me what she looked like when they slept together. Oh, he told me everything about her. He told me of many things I had never heard about before. He said she knew all those things. Then he went away and left me. Someone came and took the baby away from me. They jerked her out of my arms and ran out of the house and out of sight before I could stop them. I did not know how to stop them. I did not know what to do. Then I went up there, where his home was. His sisters and mother had my baby, holding her in their arms.

They would not even let me touch her, or kiss her. When I tried to reach for her, they pushed me back and shut the door. They left me standing there on the porch, shutting the door and locking it to keep me out."

And then about the first week of their marriage. But what was it she said? Something about how they loved each other. The way he had of waking her up in the morning. And something else. What was that? But he loved her then, almost as much as she loved him.

Oh, there were hundreds of things she had said. I remember everything, but I can't recall the words she used. I can't repeat them. She uttered them in a jumble of things. They had come from her lips like the jumbled parts of a cut-out puzzle. There was no man wise enough or patient enough to put the words in their correct order. If I attempted to put them together, there would be too many "ands" and "buts" and "theys" and thousands of other words left over. They would make no sense in human ears. They were messages from her heart. Only feeling is intelligible there. Sounds that "ands" and "buts" and "theys" make never reach that deep. Only feeling reaches those depths. The words from her lips were never intended to be reassembled in the first place. Let them go. Let them resound their poor meanings upon trivial ears.

All that was before. It was before anything had happened. Nothing had yet taken place. All that was to be, was yet to come. There had been words, movements, and glances; but nothing at all had happened. You feel

such things. Sounds cannot talk like that. Sounds in ears have only the sensation of loudness and softness. All that is unimportant. It is trivial. What I love and hate is the feeling of things. I felt her. I am not lying about it. I did feel her. And I am trying to tell of what I felt. It was the quiver of her heart against my heart.

All that was before those quick movements when she looked at me once more, and left. It was the last of them all. There was nothing more to come afterward. Everything else had been before, and now it had happened.

The rail was before us. Her hands were resting on it, then gripping it tightly, so tightly that the tips of her fingers became white. A tightening of her fingers over the varnished rail was the beginning of it all. Nothing had happened until then. I can't lie about this thing.

The lights on the Connecticut shore were a long way off. They were farther away than ever. There was no background of land, only the dim lights hanging over the foreshore like fire-flies caught and pinned to the bare limbs of weather-whipped trees.

She did not say she was going. We knew that. She did not pause to remind me of herself. She did not expect me to think of her as one who was going. That's all it was. She had been standing beside me this moment, the next she was gone. It was a moment of un-hurried simplicity. She leaned over the rail, far over, balancing herself before my eyes. Then with no effort,

only the weight of her unbalancing body to carry her, she went over the boatside out of sight.

I could have stopped her. Of course I could have stopped her. I am not denying that. And lies could be told about that, too. But I can't lie about it. I did not try to stop her. My hands did not move. But who would have wished to stop her? Is there anyone who would have done that? Only a coward would have grasped her, held her, and called for help. But we do not wish to be cowards. I'm sure of that. And I know. I was there. That's why I'm so certain about it. Only a coward would have caught her and pulled her away from the rail. But we do not wish to be cowards. We try our hardest to keep from it. All of us wish to be brave, and we try our best to be above cowardice. We believe we are brave, and we attempt to act the part.

I was brave. I let her go. I stood with my arms within reach of her, watching her go. I even had to move my left arm out of the way so she could go. If I had not moved it out of the way, she would have had to exert herself to get past me. So I stood there, brave, watching her go over the boatside. When she had gone, I began to count. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven——

What was it she had said about her husband? Something about his hair. Its color. Blond. His hair was blond. She had told me that. But what was the color of her hair? She had not told me that. I had seen it with my own eyes. What was it? Blond? No. Brown? No. Red? No. Black? No. Then what was it! I don't

know. I can't remember. I've forgotten. But it was her color. That was all it should have been. That is enough.

I was counting—forty-seven, forty-eight, forty-nine—**FIFTY!** That's enough. She has gone. **GONE!**

What were all those things I could have done? The things I might have done? There were so many I can't recall most of them now. But it doesn't matter. But do something! Jump after her! No. Call for help! No. What then? Nothing! I did not wish to become a coward. I was not afraid to see a woman die. If she was not afraid to die, why should I be afraid to witness the death? Only the brave can take themselves into death. Life is too precious for the most miserable of us—when we are cowards. Only the brave can walk to death without a blindfold. The cowards fight for the last breath, for the last glimpse, for the final touch. Cowards do not wish to die. But she was not afraid. Then why should I be afraid to witness her death? Am I a coward beside a brave woman! She did not expect me to be a coward. I could not deceive her.

Oh, I might have done many things. I could first of all have stopped her from going. Then what? Notify the Captain? Report it to the police at the dock? Make an effort to reach her husband through the newspapers? Why? Why should I have done anything? The death of a brave woman could not make me become a coward.

The time to act was when she had leaned over the rail. Before she went over. But I didn't. I wished her to feel her happiness in the act. We are only happy

when we can do the thing we desire above all others. I was not afraid to stand and watch her. I was afraid to be a coward in the presence of a brave woman, a woman who was not afraid to be happy for a few moments.

'That was all. And now this doesn't make much sense. The words are a jumble. The sounds they make are sometimes loud, sometimes soft. None of them is of any importance whatever. Only feeling matters. It is of that which has been told. I have been telling of feeling, the quiver of her heart against my heart.

Crown-Fire

WHEN I stood up the next time, I saw Irene coming around the bend in the road, swinging her wide-brimmed hat beside her. Her face was flushed and her cheeks were the color of ripe oranges. Over her shoulders her long hair fell in waves, rippling like the mane of her father's sorrel mare pacing along the cowpath in the pasture.

The moment I first saw her, I sat down quickly, trying to hide myself in the tall roadside grass. I was afraid she would see me before she reached the place where I was, and would turn and run across the field before I could speak to her.

Irene was walking slowly, looking backward every few steps at the fires on the eastern ridge. The whole world seemed to have been on fire that day. The air was dense with blue woodsmoke, and, now that evening had come, the flames on the ridge began to color the sky. There had been no rain for almost a month, and the fields and woods were burning night and day. No one tried to stop the fires; only rain could stop the flames from eating over the earth eastward and westward.

I did not know what Irene was going to do when I jumped up and surprised her. I did not wish her to run

away from me again; each time I had tried to walk home with her in the evening she had run so fast that I could not keep up with her. But I had to see her and to talk with her. I had wished all that summer to be able to walk along the road with her. Once she had said she did not hate me; but no matter what I said to her, she continued to run away from me, leaving me alone in the road.

Just as she reached the place where I was, I pushed aside the tall grass and sprang to the road beside her. I was certain I could hear the beating of her heart; she was so frightened she did not know what to do.

"Please, Irene," I begged, catching her arm and holding it tightly in my hands, "please let me walk part of the way home with you. Will you? Please let me, Irene."

She was still too frightened to speak or to move. Her heart was beating as madly as that of a captured rabbit.

"Irene," I said, trembling until my voice sounded as though it were hundreds of miles away, "please let me, this one time. Will you?"

Her breath was becoming slower. The rise and fall of her bosom was slower and more even, and the trembling of her lips had stopped.

"Please stop holding me, Sidney," she said.

"Let me walk part of the way home with you, Irene. Please let me, this one time."

"Why do you ask to do that?"

She continued to look at me while I tried to think

of something to tell her. I could think of no reason, except that I wished to go with her. I had waited all summer for the time to come when she would let me walk with her; but now when she had asked me why I wished to go with her, I did not know what to say.

"I've got to go with you, Irene," I said, clutching her arm tighter. "I've got to walk home with you."

"I can't let you do that," she said. "You mustn't."

"Why, Irene? Tell me why. Why won't you let me?"

She turned her head and looked back at the red sky over the ridge. There was no sound of shouting men, no cracking of falling pines; there was only the deepening red of the sky at night.

Because I had been waiting all summer, ever since school was out in June, for the time to come when I might walk along the road with her in the evening—because I had lain awake night after night, staring at the blackness, thinking of her—because I could not keep myself from touching her—I released her arm and pressed my hand over her bosom. There was a period of time, an interval so short I knew of no way of measuring its length, when she did not move. Her head was turned towards the fires on the ridge when I clutched her, and she closed her eyes tightly, and, her lips parting, her breath again came quick. Then as suddenly as I had placed my hand over her breasts, she jerked away from me and ran down the road towards home.

"Please, Irene," I begged, running after her; "please

come back. I didn't mean to make you run away. Let me go with you."

She was running swiftly, but not so swiftly as I was. I caught her arm again and pulled her back. I could not force her to stop, and we walked along the road while I held her.

"I'm going to tell your father, Sidney," she said. "You just wait and see if I don't. I'm going to tell him what you did to me. You just wait and see if I don't tell your father."

I did not know what to say. I did not mind so much the whipping he would give me as I did my father's knowledge of what I had done to her. I did not know what to do. I was afraid to release her arm, and I was afraid to continue holding her.

"I'm going to tell your father on you, Sidney," she kept on saying. "You just wait and see if I don't. I'm going to tell him what you did to me in the road."

When we reached the churchyard where the path was that made a short cut to Irene's house, we both stopped. It had become darker, and the reflection of the fires against the sky was so bright I could even see the tears in Irene's eyes when she turned her head towards me. Both of us stood in the churchyard trembling, and looking at the red sky and at each other.

"Why did you do that, Sidney?" she asked.

"When I went to the road to wait for you, Irene, I didn't think of doing anything like that. I only wished to see you and walk home with you. But—when I caught

you—I couldn't keep from touching you. I had to. I just had to put my hand on you somewhere."

The fires on the ridge drew her gaze towards them once more. She could not keep from looking at the smoke and flame and at the dull red glow overhead.

Suddenly she turned and looked directly at me.

"Sidney, if you don't let me go," she said, "I'll scream. I'll scream until everybody hears me."

At any other time I would have put my hand over her mouth; this time I released her arm and placed my hands over her breasts, holding her more desperately than I had the first time. She did not move. She stood still, looking backward at the fires on the ridge. The night was almost light as day[•] by that time. The shadows were long and gray, and the air was filled with blue woodsmoke. We stood in the churchyard path, waiting.

Wind on the ridge had risen, and the flames were leaping higher into the night. While we watched them, we could see the flames climbing into the tree-tops and burning the pine needles. A little later, the fire in the underbrush and in the grass had almost died out; but in the tops of the pines it burned faster and brighter than ever.

"It's a crown-fire now," Irene said. "Look—the pine tops are burning!"

The sight we saw made us tremble. We were standing close to each other, holding each other. Irene's face was more flushed than ever, and her bosom rose and fell

faster than it had in the road when I sprang at her from the tall grass.

"A crown-fire can't be stopped until it burns itself out," she said. "I'm afraid of crown-fires."

She placed her hands over my hands and pressed them tightly against her. Then she leaned against me, and I could feel the soft warmth of her body touching mine. Her heart beat so madly that I could feel with my hands its throb through her body, and her breath came so quickly that, even though I held her firmly, her breasts trembled as her lips were doing.

I did not know for how long a time I had held my face against the soft warmth of her throat when she suddenly raised my head and kissed my lips and tore herself out of my arms. It was much later though, because the crown-fire had burned off into the distance, almost out of sight.

"I've got to go home now, Sidney," she said; "if I don't go now, they'll be coming after me."

I ran after her, and stopped. We were then on the other side of the churchyard, at the end of the path. Through the trees I could see the lights of her house.

"Will you let me walk home with you tomorrow evening, Irene, and every evening?" I asked.

She stopped a moment and looked back at me. I waited, shaking all over, to hear her reply. I was afraid that she would say she would not allow me to come with her again.

While I waited, clutching at a tree beside me, she

looked off into the distance towards the ridge where the fire had been. There was no light in the sky then, and the air was clearing of woodsmoke. I went a step nearer, gripping the rough bark of the pine tree between my fingers.

“Will you, Irene?”

Without a word, she turned and ran through the grove towards the lights in her home. After she had gone, I stood beside the tree listening. I had hoped so much that she would promise to let me come with her again the next evening, and every evening after that, that I could not believe she had gone away without an answer.

Later I walked back through the dark churchyard, out of the path, and up the road past the tall grass where I had lain that afternoon. There was no longer a light in the sky over the ridge. The crown-fire had burned itself out at the edge of the cleared field. Until there was again fire on the ridge, perhaps not again until the next summer, I knew she would run away from me each time I tried to stop her. Every day when I wished to see her, I should have to hide in the tall roadside grass and look at her while she passed. I knew I could never again catch her as I had done that evening, because ever after she would be on guard against me, and if I should spring from the tall grass and succeed in catching her, she would surely tell my father of what I had done to her.

Long before I reached home I had made up my mind

to catch her again some day and to hold her as I had done for nearly an hour that night. I knew I should never again be happy until I held her again and could feel her soft warm lips kiss mine; I should never again be happy until she pressed my hands against her to hold tighter the trembling of her breasts. Some day, that year or the years following, there would again be a crown-fire on the ridge. New pines would spring up to take the places of the burned ones, and someone would drop lighted matches in the dry underbrush.

The Empty Room

THE first time I saw her was something more than a year after they had become married. The funeral was over and all the people had left and we were in the house alone. There was nothing I could say to her, and she had not spoken since the morning before. She and Finley had been married only a little more than a year, and she was still far from being twenty. Her body was in the beauty of girlhood, but she was only a child.

She had sat by the window, looking out at the gathering dusk until late in the evening, and night was coming. I had not turned on the lights, and she had not moved in her chair for several hours. From where I was, I could see her darkly framed profile motionless against the gray evening like an ebony cameo. It was then that I knew that there could be beauty even in sorrow. Hers was of the most beautiful.

Finley was the only brother I had ever had, and before his death he was the only one I had left in the world, and she was his widow.

Her name was Thomasine, but I had not yet called her by it. I had not become used to it, and there is something about an unfamiliar name that guards itself against a stranger's thoughtless intrusion. When the

time came for me to call her by her name, I knew I would be speaking a sound that was hers alone.

I was a stranger in the house and we had not yet spoken to each other. Finley had been her husband, and my brother, and I was not then certain what our relationship became thereby. I knew, though, that we could not for long stay in the house alone without an understanding of her place and mine becoming clear.

The twilight was chill, and the dark room was an expanding void, receding into its wall-less immensity. Her profile was becoming softer as the gray dusk fell away to the obscurity of night. The walls retreated and the room became a place made without them. The room was immense and her profile against the gray dusk melted into the growing darkness of the house.

While she sat across the room she had not fully realized her loneliness. The curve of her head and shoulders drooped with the enveloping shadows, but she was not thinking of even her own presence. Finley had been dead such a short time.

When she got up to go, I got up also, and walked across the room towards her. I went to her side and stood at arm's length from her, but the distance between us could only have been measured by the bounds of the room's infinite space. I wished to put my arms around her and comfort her as I would have comforted the one I loved, but she was Finley's widow, and the room with its walls made distance immeasurable. The

room in which we stood was hollow and wide, and it swam in the darkness of its vast space. A spark from a flint would have struck us blind with the intensity of its light, and the certain conflagration would have consumed us to ashes.

Before I came to the house I had given no thought to a girl whose name would be Thomasine, and now she was my brother's widow.

Some of the flowers in the room had curled for the night, but petals from the roses fell gently to the floor.

Suddenly she whispered, turning in the darkness towards me.

"Did you feed Finley's rabbits tonight?"

"Yes, I fed them," I told her. "I gave them all they can eat. They have everything they want for the night."

Her hair had fallen over her shoulders, boiling thickly about her head. Her hair was citrus color, and it strangely matched the darkness of the room and the blackness of her clothes. Its color made her sorrow more uncomfortable, because hers was the head that bowed the deepest in the darkness of the immense room. When I stared at the inky blackness of the walls not within sight, I could somehow see the quickness of her citrus hair tousled on my brother's chest while he kissed the smoothness of her profile and caressed the softness of her limbs. The beauty and richness of their year of love was yielding, though slowly, to the expanding darkness. It was in the darkness of the hollow room that I was able to believe in the finality of death, and

to believe the sorrow I felt in her heart. Lovers for a year cannot believe the finality of death, and she least among them. I wished to tell her all I knew of it, but my words would have told only the triviality. Her love was not to be confused with death, and she would not have wished to understand it.

It was then to be the beginning of night.

I could not see her go, but I felt her leave the chair by the window. I walked behind her, touching the unfamiliar furniture, and guiding myself through the room and around it time after time by the direction of the citrus scent of her hair.

She stopped then, and I realized that I was in the bedroom. I found myself standing in the doorway knowing only one direction, and that was the fragrant citrus scent which came from her hair. When she went from corner to corner, I stood in the doorway of the room waiting for her to speak, for a word to send me away until morning. If there was anything else she wished, or if there was nothing I could do, she had not told me.

The lonely walk from corner to corner and back again, and the still coldness of her bed, echoed through the hollow room. I could hear her walk across the floor to the bed, touch it with her fingers, and walk back across the carpeted floor to the window. She stood by the window looking out at the nothing of night, the black nothing, while I waited for her to tell me to close the door and go away and leave her alone.

Though she was in the room, and I was in the door-

way, and the rabbits were just outside the window, the emptiness about us descended upon the house like the stillness of night without stars and the moon. When I reached out my arms, they stretched to regions unknown, and when I looked with my eyes, they seemed to be searching for light in all corners of the dark heavens.

She knew I was waiting in the doorway for a word to send me away, but she was helpless in her loneliness. She knew she could not bear to be alone in the room whose walls could not be seen at such a great distance. She knew her loneliness could not be dispelled with a word uttered in the hollow darkness, and she knew herself alone could not be propelled from the immensity of the house.

My brother had written to me of her with a feeling of regret because I did not have someone like her to love. He had been with her a year, sharing this house and sharing this bed. Each night they had gone side-by-side into this room where she was now but for me alone. Then it was that I could feel the loneliness of this night, because he had been taken away from her; while I, who had never known such love, was never to be made a part of it.

Once more she went to the bed and touched it. The room was dark and the bed was still. She knew now that she was to be alone.

She began to cry softly, like a girl cries.

Her slippers she dropped from her feet, and the echo

was like the throwing of a man's solid-heeled shoes against the floor.

When she touched a comb on the table and it fell to the floor in the darkness, it might have been a man's clumsy hands feeling in the night and knocking clocks and mirrors from their places.

Her knees touched a chair, but the sound was like a man walking blindly in a dark room, stumbling over furniture and cursing hoarsely under his breath.

The clothes she removed were laid on a chest at the foot of the bed, but it was as if a man were tossing his heavy-laden coat and trousers across the room towards a chair.

Noiselessly she raised the window, but it was as if a man had thrown it open, impatient with delay.

She sat on the side of the bed and lay down upon it, but it was like a man hurling himself there and jerking the cover over him.

Softly she turned over and lay her arm across the far pillow, but it sounded in the hollow room as if a man were tossing there, beating the pillows with his fists.

Her body began to tremble with her sobs, faintly shaking the springs of the bed and the mattress, but it was like the ruthless action of a man quick with his uncontrolled strength.

I do not know how long I had stood in the doorway waiting for a word from her to send me away. Time in the pitch blackness of the house of hollow darkness

had passed quickly at first, and then slowly. It may have been an hour, it may have been five.

I parted my lips and spoke to her. The sounds of my words seemed to be without an end in their echo.

"Good night, Thomasine," I said, trembling.

She screamed with fright and with pain. Had someone cut her heart with a knife, she could not have screamed more loudly.

Then slowly she turned over in bed and lay on her other side.

"My God! My God! My God!"

The pillow she had been clutching fell from the far side of the bed to the floor, crashing in the darkness like a felled tree deep in a forest.

Evening gave way, and night in the empty room began.

Over the Green Mountains

WAS reading a piece in the Boston paper last night about the smartest people in the whole country coming from the State of Maine. Said at the time, and I'm still here to say it: you can take your pick of any ten men in the whole Union, and I'll back one Varmonter of my own choosing against them any day. Take ten men from any of the states you can find them in, and all of them put together won't have the smartness that my lone Varmonter has got. Have lived in the State of Maine all my life, ninety-odd years of it, but I've always said that if you want some smartness you shall have to go to Vermont to get it. Vermont is where it comes from.

Now, you take the farmers. Vermont farmers is that smart they can't keep from making money while the farmers in other places is all losing money. And here is why they are so smart: not so long ago there was a Vermont farmer over here, riding around in his big auto having a good time and laughing at us farmers here because we hadn't made enough money to retire and maybe take a trip to Florida on, in even years. I asked this Vermont farmer how it was he had made so much money running a farm.

And this is what he told me: "Friend," he said, "the

secret of making money out of a farm is this: Sell all you can; what you can't sell, feed to the hogs; what the hogs won't eat, eat yourself."

After he finished telling me that, he drove off laughing in his big auto to look at some more Maine farmers working and sweating in the fields because they ain't got sense enough to make money to retire on, and maybe take a winter trip to Florida, in even years.

That sporting farmer wasn't the first Varmonter I'd known, though. I used to know another one when I was a young man on the Penobscot.

This was a young fellow we called Jake Marks, one of them old-time Varmonters who used to come over here to the State of Maine driving teams of oxen before the railroads was built across the mountains. This Jake Marks was a smart one, if there ever was a Varmonter who warn't. He used to drive his oxen over here hauling freight back and forth all the time. It was a long haul in them days, when you stop and think how slow them brutes travel, and Jake had a lot of mountain to cross coming and going. I don't recall how long it took him to make one of his trips, but it was quite a time in them days when there warn't no State roads, only trails wide enough for a yoke of oxen.

Jake was a real young man at that time, I should say about twenty-five, maybe twenty-seven. He warn't married then, neither. But pretty soon he took a liking to a young and handsome filly who cooked his meals for him at the house in Bangor where he put up while he

was changing cargo between trips. She was just the kind of young filly that Jake wanted, too. She used to come into the room where he sat waiting for his meal and make herself real frisky in his presence. Jake, he was tormented something awful by the way she cut up in front of him, and he used to have to get up out of his chair sometimes and walk real fast around the house three-four times to get control over himself.

But this Jake Marks was a cautious man, and he never undertook a deal until he had thought it out a lot beforehand and saw that he had everything on his side. Then, when he had thought it all through, he turned loose and went after whatever it was he wanted like a real Varmonter. All them old-time Varmonters was like that, I guess; anyway, the ones who used to drive ox-freights over here to the State of Maine was, and Jake was just like all the rest of them.

This young filly of Jake's got so she pestered him about marrying of her all the time he was resting up between trips. Jake, he wanted her, all right. That was one thing he was wanting all the time he was over here. But Jake, he was taking his own good time about it, I'm telling you. He was figuring the thing out like all them Varmonters who drove ox-freights did. He had to be real certain that everything was on his side before he made any signs. He took the rest of the season for figuring the thing out, and he didn't make motions of a move toward the young filly that year at all.

The next spring when the frost had thawed out of

the ground and when he could make his first trip of the year over the mountains, Jake he called at the house where this young filly stayed and told her to get ready to be married to him when he got back to Bangor on his next trip. That suited the young filly first-rate. She had been uneasy all winter about Jake, taking too much at heart all the gossip that was talked about them Vermont ox-freighters. But when Jake told her to get ready for marrying, she knew he would keep his promise right down to the last letter and come and marry her like he said he would.

So, Jake he went back to Vermont with his freight, promising to be ready to marry the young filly the same day he got back to Bangor on his next trip.

And just as he promised, Jake came back to get married to the young filly. He went straight to the house where she stayed, and there she was all waiting for him. Jake told her to get ready right away for the marriage, and then he went out to find a preacher somewhere. When he got back to the house with the preacher, he called her down to the room where all the guests had gathered to see the ceremony performed.

The minute she stepped into the room where Jake and the rest of the people was, Jake took one look at the young filly and told her to go back upstairs to her room and take off her dress. Well, that was all right and proper, because in those days there was a law in the State of Maine to the effect that a man could make what was called a shift-marriage. That was to say, the

man could make the woman take off the dress she was wearing while the ceremony was being performed, and in that case he could not be held legally responsible for her past debts and would not have to pay them for her if he didn't have a mind to. Well, Jake he had heard all about this shift-law in Maïpe, and he was taking full advantage of its benefits. That was what he had been figuring out all the time he was driving them slow-footed oxen back and forth between Bangor and Vermont. Jake, he warn't no man's fool. Jake, he was a Varmonter.

After a while Jake's young filly came downstairs dressed according to this here shift-law. She had on what women wore under their dresses in those days, and that was all she had on. But Jake, he warn't satisfied, not completely. He told her to go back upstairs and take off everything she had on. Jake, he was a hard-headed ox-freighter from Vermont, all right. He had figured all this out while he was driving them slow-footed oxen back and forth across the mountains.

In a little while his young filly came into the room again where Jake and the preacher and all the guests was, and she didn't have nothing on, except that she had a bedsheet wrapped around her, which was a good thing, I tell you. She was a handsome-looking filly if there ever was one.

They all got ready again for the ceremony, the preacher telling them where to stand and what to say to the questions he was getting ready to ask them. Then,

just when they was beginning to get married, Jake he told his young filly to drop the bedsheet on the floor. Now, Jake he warn't taking no chances over here in the State of Maine. That shift-law said that if a woman was married without her dress on, her husband couldn't be held liable for her past debts, and Jake he figured that if the young filly didn't have nothing at all on her, there wouldn't be a chance in the whole world for to dun him for what she might owe, while if she had clothes on that he didn't know the true and legal names of, a storekeeper might try to say her underclothes was her overdress. Jake, he was thinking that he might by chance get cheated out of his rights to the full benefits of the shift-law if he didn't take care, and Jake he warn't after taking no chances whatsoever over here in the State of Maine when he was so far away from Vermont. He was as cautious where he sat his foot as the next ox-freighter from Vermont.

"Drop the bedsheet on the floor," Jake he told the young filly again.

The young filly was getting ready to turn loose the bedsheet and let it drop on the floor like Jake told her to do, when the preacher he grabbed the bedsheet and held to it tight around her so she wouldn't show none of her naked self to him and Jake and the rest of the people in the house.

"No! No! No!" he yelled, getting red in the face and shaking his head at Jake. "That won't do, my man—that won't do at all! That would be indecent here

before all of us! That can't be done! I'll never allow it!"

But the preacher he didn't know Jake Marks. Jake was one of them Vermont ox-freighters, and he was as hard-headed about what he wanted as the next one to come along. Jake, he told the young filly again to drop the bedsheet on the floor, and to drop it quick if she wanted to get married.

The handsome young filly was getting ready to let go of it like Jake said to, because she was that crazy about Jake she would have stood on her head right then and there if Jake had told her to do it, but just when she was getting ready to let go of it, the preacher he grabbed the bedsheet again and held it fast with both hands.

The preacher started in trying to argue with Jake about it being indecent for the handsome young filly to stand there naked while she was being married, but Jake he had his head set on getting the full benefits of the shift-law and he wouldn't give in an inch.

Then the preacher said he warn't going to perform the ceremony if that was what Jake was set on doing, and Jake he told the preacher he warn't going to get married at all without the bedsheet being dropped on the floor so that none of the cloth was touching the young filly.

Everybody got excited when Jake said that, and the people talked back and forth for an hour or more, arguing first on Jake's side, because they knew the law on

the books, and then on the preacher's side, because they realized how it might upset the preacher if the handsome young filly stood there naked like Jake was set on having her do. The young filly didn't care which way the ceremony was done, just so long as Jake married her. She was willing to drop the bedsheet for Jake the minute the preacher let her. She was all excited about getting married, just like Jake had been all the time.

After a while the preacher gave in to Jake just a little. He saw what a fool he was, trying to argue with a Vermont ox-freighter.

"If she'll go inside the closet and shut the door so nobody can see her nakedness, I'll perform the ceremony," the preacher told Jake.

"That's all right by me," Jake said, "but I'll be compelled to have some witnesses on my side in case anybody tries to dispute me about us being married under the shift-law or not."

They finally settled that part when the preacher agreed to allow two of the older women to go in the closet with the young filly, just to make sure that everything was done in a legal manner. The preacher he didn't like to have Jake going in a closet with the naked filly, but he was pretty well worn out by that time after arguing for nearly two hours with a Vermont ox-freighter, and he said he would have to allow Jake to go in the closet, too.

Jake went in the closet where the filly and the two older women were.

"Now, you just look once, Jake," the preacher said, shaking his head back and forth, "and then you shut your eyes and keep them shut."

Jake was in the closet saying something to the young filly, but nobody in the room could hear what it was. The preacher he reached over and made a bit of a crack in the door while he was marrying them so he could hear their answers to the questions. And all that time Jake he was in there striking matches to make sure that the young filly was not putting the bedsheet on again, and to be certain that he was getting the full benefits of the shift-law.

When it was all done, the preacher he took the money Jake handed him and went off home without waiting to see what shape the young and handsome filly was in when the closet door was opened. When they came out into the room, the bedsheet was all twisted up into a knot; Jake handed it to her, and she didn't lose no time in getting upstairs where her clothes were. Jake he had told her to hurry and get dressed, because he wanted to get started with his ox-freight back to Vermont.

They started home to Vermont right away, the handsome young filly all dressed up in her wedding clothes and sitting on top of the freight-cargo while Jake he walked along beside the wagon bellowing at the oxen.

When Jake came back to Bangor on his next trip, a storekeeper tried to present him a bill for a hundred and forty dollars. The storekeeper told Jake that the young filly had bought a lot of dresses and things just

before she got married, and he wanted to know if Jake had married her under the shift-law.

Jake just laughed a little, and started unloading his cargo.

"Well, was you married that way, or the other way?" the storekeeper asked him.

"You tell me this first," Jake said, "and then I'll answer your question. Does the State of Maine have a shift-law on the books?"

"Well, yes; but the shift-law says that the woman has to——"

"Never mind about explaining it to me," Jake said. "If the shift-law is on the statute books, then that's the law I married her with."

The Grass Fire

DURING the last week of April nobody with any sense at all would have gone out and deliberately set fire to a hay field. There had been no rainfall since the March thaw and the country was as dry as road dust in midsummer. The farmers who had fields that needed burning over were waiting for a heavy shower of rain to come and soak the ground thoroughly before they dared begin the spring firing.

Carl Abbott had been in the habit of burning over his fields the last week of April for the past thirty years and he said that he was not going to start that late in his life letting his new crop hay be ruined by raspberry bushes and gray birch seedlings if he knew anything about it. The people in the town thought he was merely talking to himself again to make himself heard, and that he really had the good sense to keep fire away from dry grass until a hard rain had come. Carl was always talking about the way he stuck to his lifelong habits, and people never paid much attention to him any more, anyway.

It was late in the afternoon when Carl got ready to fire the field on the north side of his farm. He carried two buckets of water with him, and a broom, and went up the side road to the north field.

When he reached the gate, he saw Jake Thompson come driving down the backroad. Carl tried to get through the gate and behind the stonewall before Jake saw him, but he could not hide himself quickly enough because of the two buckets of water he was carrying, and his wooden leg.

"Hey there!" Jake called, whipping up his horse. "What you doing in that hay field?"

Carl waited until Jake drove up to the gap in the wall. He put the buckets down and leaned against the broom handle.

"I'm standing here looking at you," Carl told him. "But I'm already tired of doing that, and so now I'm going in here and fire my hay field."

"Why! you damned old fool," Jake said, "don't you know that you'll burn up your whole farm if you do that now? Feel that wind—it'll carry flame down across that meadow and into that woodlot before you know which way to look. Nobody with any sense would fire a hay field until after a good heavy rain comes and soaks the ground."

"I didn't ask for the loan of any of your advice," Carl said.

"And I don't generally pass it around to every damn fool I meet, either," Jake said, "but I hate to have to sit here and see a man burn up all he's got and ever will have. The town's not going to raise money to waste on supporting you. There's too many just like you living on the town already."

"Guess I can live on the town if I've a mind to. Been paying taxes for thirty years and more."

"If it was left up to me," Jake said, "I'd dig a big hole in the ground and cover you up in it. And I'm man enough left to do it, too."

Carl stooped over and picked up the water buckets.

"Didn't you hear about that grass fire over in the east part of town day before yesterday?" Jake asked. "A man over there set fire to his hay field and it got loose from him and burned up his wife."

"That's nothing to concern me," Carl said. "Haven't got a wife, and never felt the need for one. It's people with wives who do all the fool things in the world, anyway."

"Guess you're right about that," Jake said. "I was about to let it slip my mind that your daddy had a wife."

Carl turned around with the water buckets and walked a dozen yards out into the field. The dead grass was almost waist high, and it cracked and waved in the wind like chaff in a hay barn. Each time Carl took a step in the dead grass a puff of dust rose up behind him and blew away in the wind. Carl was beginning to believe that Jake was right after all. He had not realized how dry the country really was.

Jake drove his horse and buggy to the side of the road and crossed his legs. He sat back to wait and see how big a fool Carl Abbott really was.

"If you go and fire that hay field, you'd better go

take out some insurance on your stock and buildings. They won't be worth a dime otherwise; though I guess if I was hard put to it, I could give you a dollar for the ashes, including yours. They'd make the finest kind of top dressing for my potato field this year."

"If you've got any business of your own, why don't you go and attend to it?" Carl said. "Didn't invite you to stay here."

"By God, I pay just as many taxes for the upkeep of the town's roads as you do, Carl Abbott. Shall stand here until I get good and ready to go somewhere else."

Carl always said something or did something to make Jake angry whenever they got within sight or hearing distance of each other.

Jake crossed his legs again and snapped the leaves off a birch seedling with his horse whip.

The wind was coming down from the northeast, but it shifted so frequently that nobody could have determined its true direction. In the month of April there was no way of finding out which way the wind was blowing. Jake had said that in April the wind came in all directions, except straight up, and that if man were to dig a hole in the ground it would come that way, too.

Carl stooped over in the grass and struck a match on the seat of his pants. He held the flame close to a tuft of grass and weathered it with his hands.

The flame flared up so quickly and so suddenly that it jumped up through his arms and singed his whiskers

before he could get out of the way. The wind was true in the east just then, and it was blowing at about thirty miles an hour. The flame died down almost as suddenly as it had flared up, and a column of white smoke coiled straight upward for a few feet before it was caught in the wind and carried down over the meadow. The fire was smoldering in the dead grass, and the white smoke showed that it was feeding on the crisp dry tufts that grew around the stems like powder puffs. A hay field could never be burned over completely if it were not for the small coils of grass that curled in tufts close to the ground. When the tufts blazed, the long waist-high stems caught and burned through. Then the tall grass fell over as if it were being mown with a scythe, and the fire would be under way, feeding itself far faster than any number of men could have done.

Jake Thompson watched the white smoke boil and curl in the air. He saw Carl walk over to one of the buckets and souse the broom in the water, taking all the time he wished. Then he went back to the fire and stood looking at it smolder in the tufts.

A fairly new, well-sewn house broom and a pail or two of water was the finest kind of fire-fighting equipment in a hay field. But farmers who burned over hay fields rarely undertook such a task without having three or four men to help keep the fire under control. Six men who knew how to souse a broom in a bucket of water at the proper time, keeping it sufficiently wet so the broom-straw would not catch on fire, could burn

over the largest hay field in the state. Water alone would not even begin to put out a grass fire; it was the smothering of the flame with the broad side of the broom that kept it from spreading. But nobody with any sense at all would have thought of firing a field that year until a rain had come and made the ground moist and dampened the grass tufts. Under those conditions a field would have burned so slowly that one man could have kept it under control.

Jake knew that Carl did not have a chance in the world of being able to check that fire once it had got under way.

The white smoke was boiling upward in a column the size of a barrel-head by that time. The wind had shifted again, circling around Carl's back and blowing down across the meadow from a new angle. The grass tops bowed under the force of the wind, and the wind was changing so frequently that it kept the field waving first in one and then in some other direction. Carl looked around and overhead as if by that he were doing something that would cause the wind to die down into a breeze.

Jake crossed his legs again and waited to see what was going to happen next. Carl Abbott was without doubt the biggest fool he had ever known.

Suddenly the flames shot into the air higher than Carl's head and began leaping across the field towards the meadow like a pack of red foxes let loose. Carl jumped backward, stumbling, and overturning one of

the buckets of water. The flames bent over under the force of the wind until they looked as if they were lying flat on top of the grass. That made the field burn even faster still, the leaping flame setting fire to the grass quicker than the eye could follow. It had been burning no longer than two or three minutes, but in that short time it had spread out into the shape of a quarter cut of pie, and it was growing larger and larger each second. Carl ran around in circles, his wooden leg sticking into the ground and tripping him with nearly every step. He would have to stop every step or two and take both hands to pull the wooden peg out of the ground.

"Hey there, Carl Abbott!" Jake shouted at him above the roar of the burning grass. "What in hell are you doing out there! Get away from that fire!"

Carl heard Jake but he paid no attention to what he said. He was trying to beat out the fire with his wet broom, but his work was not checking the flames in any direction. He was so excited that, instead of beating at the flames, most of the time he was holding the broom in the fire, and hitting the water buckets with his wooden leg. The broom caught on fire, and then he did not know which way to turn. When he did succeed in hitting at the fire with the broom, as fast as he smothered one tuft of grass it caught fire again almost immediately. In the meantime two or three fresh ones blazed up beside it.

"Come out of there, you damn fool!" Jake shouted

at him. "You'll be cooked and ready to eat if you don't get out of that fire!"

Carl's hat had fallen off and had already burned into a handful of gray ashes. His whiskers were singed close to his face, making him appear at a distance as if he had had a shave, and his peg leg was charred. If he had stood still all the time he would not have been hurt, because the fire would have burned away from him; but Carl ran right into the hottest part of it, almost out of sight in the smoke and flame. His woolen pants were smoking, his coat was dropping off in smoking pieces, and a big black circle was spreading on his shirt where a spark had ignited the blue cotton cloth.

Jake jumped out of his buggy and ran into the hay field calling Carl. He could not sit there and see a man burn himself alive, even if the man was Carl Abbott.

He grabbed Carl and dragged him away from the flame and threw him down on the ground where the grass had already burned over. Carl's wooden leg was burned completely through, and as he fell to the ground it broke off in half. All that was left of it was a charred pointed stub about six or eight inches long. Carl had made the peg himself, and, instead of using oak as Jake had advised him to do, he had made it out of white pine because, he said, it would be lighter to carry around. Jake dragged him by the collar to the gap in the stone-wall and dumped him in the road. Carl tried to stand up, forgetting the burned-off peg, and he tumbled over into the drain ditch and lay there helplessly.

"You would go ahead and act like a damn fool, after all, wouldn't you?" Jake said. "It's a pity I didn't let you stay out there and make ashes. They would have been worth more than you are alive. Meat ashes make the finest kind of dressing for any kind of crop."

Carl sat up and looked through the gap in the stone-wall at the smoking hay field. The fire line had already reached the woodlot, and flame was beginning to shoot from the top of the pines and hemlocks. Two hundred yards farther away were Carl's buildings. He had a team of horses in the barn, and a cow. There would be no way in the world to save them once the fire had reached the barn and caught the dry hay.

Jake tossed Carl a stick and watched him hobble the best he could down the road towards his house and buildings.

"What are we going to do?" he begged Jake. "We can't let my stock and buildings burn up, too."

"What we?" Jake said. "You and who else? You're not talking to me, because I'm having nothing to do with all this mess. I told you what not to do when you came up here a little while ago, but you were so damn smart I couldn't get anything through your head. That's why I'm having nothing at all to do with all this mess."

Carl protested feebly. He tried to get up and run down the road, but he fell each time he attempted to stand up.

"Why! do you think I'd have people saying that they passed your place and saw me helping you put out

a grass fire when nobody with any sense at all would ever have started one in this kind of weather? People in this town know I don't associate with crazy men. They know me better than that. That's why I don't want them to think I've lost my mind and gone p'umb crazy with you."

Carl opened his mouth, but Jake had not finished.

"I wouldn't even spit on a blade of witch-grass now if I thought it would help check that fire you started. Why! the townspeople would think I had a hand in starting it, if I went and helped you check it. Nobody would believe me if I tried to tell them I begged you not to fire your field in the beginning, and then went right out and helped you fight it. The townspeople have got better sense than to believe a tale like that. They know I wouldn't do a fool thing like you went and did. They know that I have better sense than to go out and start a fire in a hay field when it hasn't rained yet this spring. I'm no fool, Carl Abbott, even if it does appear that I'm associating with one now."

"But you can't let my stock and buildings burn up," Carl said. "You wouldn't do that, would you, Jake? I've been a fair and honest friend of yours all my life, haven't I, Jake? And didn't I cast my vote for you when you wanted to be road commissioner?"

"So I can't, can't I? Well, you just stand there and watch me try to save your stock and buildings! And this is no time to be talking politics, either. Wouldn't help you, anyway, not after the way you did there in

that hay field. I told you not to go and fire that field, and you went right ahead like a damn fool and struck a match to it, just as if I had been talking to myself away over in another part of town. No! I'm not going to do anything about it—except talk. When the townspeople ask me how your farm and buildings came to catch on fire and burn up your stock and woodlot, I'll tell them you fired it."

Carl found a heavier stick and hobbled down the road towards his house and buildings. The fire had already run through the woodlot by that time, and, as they came around the bend in the road, flame was licking at the house and barn.

Jake walked behind Carl, coming down the road, and led his horse instead of riding in the buggy. He watched Carl try to run, and he thought once of putting him into the buggy, but he did not like the idea of doing that. Townspeople would say he was riding Carl around in his horse and buggy while the stock and buildings burned up.

When they got closer to the house, the roof was ablaze, and the barn was smoking. The hay in there was dry, and it looked as if it would burst into flame any second. Carl hobbled faster when he saw his buildings burning.

"Help me get my stock out, Jake," he begged. "You won't let my stock burn up, will you, Jake?"

Jake tied his horse to a tree beside the road and ran across the yard to the barn. He could not stand there

and see a team of horses and a cow burn alive, even if they did belong to Carl Abbott. He ran to the barn and jerked open the stall doors.

An explosion of smoke, dust, and flame burst into his face, but the two horses and the cow bounded out the moment the stall doors were thrown open. The horses and cows ran across the yard and leaped over the brush by the roadside and disappeared into the field on the other side.

Jake knew it was a stroke of chance that enabled him to save the stock, because if the horses and cow had been farther in the barn, nothing could have induced them to leave it. The only way they could have been saved would have been to blindfold them and lead them out, and there would have been no time for that. The flame had already begun to reach the stalls.

Carl realized by that time that there was no chance of saving anything else. He saw the smoke and flame leap through the roof of the barn the moment that Jake had opened the stall doors. He felt terribly sick all over.

Jake went over to the tree and untied his horse. He climbed into the buggy and sat down. Carl stood looking at his burning buildings, and he was trying to lean on the big stick he had found up the backroad.

Jake whipped up his horse and started home. Carl turned around and saw him leave, but he had nothing to say.

"Whoa!" Jake said to his horse, pulling on the reins. He turned around in the buggy seat and called to Carl.

"Well, I guess you'll have better sense than to do a thing like that again, won't you? Next time maybe you will be anxious to take some advice."

Carl glared at Jake, and turned with nothing to say to stand and watch the fire. Then suddenly he shouted at Jake.

"By God, the hay field is burned over, ain't it?" he said, hobbling away. "Well, that's what I set out to do at the start."

Jake whipped up his horse and started for home. When he looked back for the last time, he saw Carl whittling on a pole. Carl had cut down a young pine and he was trimming it to replace the peg that had burned off in the hay field. He wished to make the new one out of oak, but oak was the kind of wood that Jake had told him to use in the first place.

A Woman in the House

MAX CLOUGH was getting along well enough until Elam went away over the weekend. Max had his winter's wood in, his house was sawdust-banked against the frost, and there was a good supply of pumpkin wine in the cellar. He had settled himself for a good three months' rest and he thought Elam had done the same. Both of them knew that winter was coming, as the ground was frozen every morning, and the sun was already beginning to set in the intervale by two o'clock.

But Elam went away over the weekend. He went off without coming to tell Max about it, and he left early Saturday morning before it was light enough for Max to see him go.

Only a few days before, Max had gone across the road and talked for an hour or longer, but Elam had not said a word about going away. He had not even said that he was thinking of taking a short trip. They had talked about how dear money was getting to be, and how much improved the mail delivery was since Cliff Stone had taken over the route through the intervale, and about the prospects for a new State high-road through the toyn. But Elam had said nothing about his going away over the weekend. That was the

reason why Max was upset Saturday morning when he went across the road to see Elam a moment, and found that the house was locked and that the shades were drawn.

"When a man gets to be thirty-six years old," Max said, looking sharply at the closed dwelling, "he ought to have sense enough to stay at home, instead of going off for weekends in Lewiston and throwing away dear money for lodging and what-not. Elam might possess a little sense about minor things, but he hasn't got the sense he was born with when it comes to throwing away dear money in Lewiston. Nobody but a plain fool would go to Lewiston and give a woman five-ten dollars for her bed."

He went back across the road and up the slope to his own house, glancing up the intervale and down it, as if he expected to see Elam coming home. But he knew Elam would not come home until Sunday afternoon. He had gone away before like that, and each time he had stayed the two whole days. He knew Elam would not return until the next afternoon.

Max's farm and buildings were on the eastern slope of the intervale, and Elam Stairs' were on the western slope. Between them was the Yorkfield town road. The only advantage Elam had, Max admitted, was longer sunlight in winter. The sun set on Max's house by two o'clock in midwinter, while Elam had an hour's longer sun. But Max was well enough pleased with his place, because he knew that his eastern slope grew better green peas. His land was well-watered the

year around; in midsummer, Elam's fields became dry.

For the rest of the afternoon and far into the evening, Max could not get off his mind Elam's trip. He did not envy him the weekend in Lewiston, because he knew exactly how much it would cost, but he did not wish for Elam to slip off as he did three or four times a year. It upset his carefully planned living. He could do nothing while Elam was absent from home. He had become accustomed to seeing Elam somewhere about his farm at almost any hour of the day when he looked over at the western slope, and when Elam was not there, Max was at a loss to know how to continue doing his work. And, besides that, when Elam was away, there was always the possibility that he would not come back alone. He knew he could never get over Elam's bringing home somebody with him.

They had talked such things over many times. Each time Elam went to Lewiston, he came home talking about the women he had seen on the streets and in the lodging houses. That was one reason why Max did not like for Elam to go there. Sooner or later, he knew Elam would bring home a woman.

"The women aren't suited to our lives, Elam," Max told him once. "You on your western slope, and me on my eastern slope, live as people ought to live. Just as soon as a man brings home a woman, his house is too small a space for him to live in, eight rooms or twelve rooms. Married, or housekeeper, there's no difference. It's a woman, and there's always trouble under a roof when you mix the two sexes. I wish to stay just as I

am. I wish to live peacefully, and my wish is to die the same way."

"Can't somehow always agree with you, Max," Elam said, shaking his head. "You've got a lot of sense; good, sane, horse-sense, Max. But God was required to make woman. Why! do you know that before there were any women, the men were fixing to tear the world to pieces unless women were provided?"

"Why?" Max asked.

"Why?" Elam said. "Why! because the men wouldn't stand for it any longer, that's why. They had to have housekeepers, or if they couldn't be had, just wives. There's a world of difference between the two, but at bottom they both are women, and that's what man had to have. Otherwise, us men would have to do all the sewing and cooking."

"Have always got along fairly well doing my own labor," Max said. "Never had a woman to do my work for me. I don't wish to have one in the house to cause trouble."

"Well," Elam said, "they may cause some trouble. I'm willing to grant you that. But taking all in all, their good points pretty well over-balance the bad ones. God was compelled to make them, and I don't aim to disuse anything that is provided. Guess I wish to get all there is in this life to make use of. No sense in letting it go to waste, or to have somebody else take my share, and his too. I wish to have all of everything that's due me."

Max was not convinced then, and he was still firm

in his belief that a man could live more happily and peacefully in his house alone. None of the times when Elam tried to make Max admit that women were a necessary part of existence did he succeed. Max was steadfast in his determination to live his life apart from women.

Now that Elam had gone away on another of his quarterly trips to Lewiston, Max was afraid once again that he would bring home a housekeeper. On each occasion before, he had been on edge the whole time Elam was away, and he was never able to calm himself until he could go over and see that Elam had not brought back a housekeeper. He would not even take Elam's word for it. He would first ask Elam if he came home alone, and then he would go from room to room, looking behind doors and into closets, until he was satisfied in his own mind that there was no woman in the house. After that, he would feel better. He could then go back to his own house with a calm mind.

But Elam was away again for the weekend, and Max could not sit still. He could not eat his meals, and he could not sleep. He sat beside his window looking across to the western slope, his window raised several inches in case there should be the sound of an automobile in the intervale. He sat by the window all day Saturday, Saturday evening, and Sunday.

Late Sunday afternoon, when Max knew it was time for Elam to come back home, he heard Elam's automobile coming up the intervale. He knew it was Elam's car, and he knew he could not sit there another minute.

He jumped up and found his hat and coat and started down the front doorstep.

The road was not within sight of Max's house, as there was a grove of birch trees down there, and he could not see the automobile. He heard Elam drive into his lane, however, and he waited and listened until the sound of the motor stopped abruptly in the barn.

There was something about the abruptness of the sound's stopping that caused him to pause on the doorstep. The motor was shut off the moment the car entered the barn, and then there was complete silence again in the interval. Not even the rumbling-sound of Elam closing the barn doors could be heard. Max wondered if Elam could be in such a hurry to get into his house that he had not waited to close the barn doors. He could not think of any reason to explain that. A man who was in such a great hurry to get into his house would certainly have something of importance coming up. Max thought about that, but he could think of no reason why a man would fail to close the barn doors.

He sat down on the doorstep and waited. He turned his head from side to side, allowing each ear to try to detect some sound in the interval. Surely, he thought to himself, Elam had not gone and lost his mind. But he could think of no other reason for Elam's failure to close the barn doors. A man who drove his automobile into the barn and then left the doors open would certainly be foolish, and Elam had not been known theretofore as a foolish man. Elam knew better than to leave the barn doors open when evening was coming.

The sun in the intervale was dim and gray. A bank of gray clouds had risen in the northwest, and before long there would be no more sunshine. It was after three o'clock then, and the sun had already set on the western slope. Max had become accustomed to two o'clock sunsets on the eastern slope of the intervale, but when it set before three o'clock on the western slope, he was unprepared for it.

During all the time that he had been sitting on his doorstep, Max had hoped that Elam would come over to see him and tell him about the trip to Lewiston. Elam had always done that. Each time Elam had gone away for the weekend in Lewiston, he had come home Sunday afternoon, had slammed shut the barn doors, and then had walked down the lane and up the slope and told Max what he had seen and what he had done in Lewiston. It was long past the time for him to come, and he had not even closed the barn doors. Max could not sit still and wait for Elam any longer. He got up and started down the slope towards the road.

When he reached the road, he stopped a moment and looked up towards Elam's farm and buildings. The barn door was wide open, and the automobile stood there exposed to the weather. There was no one to be seen about the house, but the shades had been opened, and the entrance door was ajar. Something was wrong, Max thought. Something had happened to Elam this time on his trip to Lewiston.

Standing beside Elam's mail box, Max looked up the slope towards the house. It was only a few hundred

yards away, and he could see everything as plainly as if he had been standing on the doorstep. The white paint was whiter than ever in the gray twilight of the intervale, and the green trim was brighter than the grass in midsummer. Max stood looking at the place, waiting.

He had been staring at the house for ten minutes without seeing a single sign of Elam, when suddenly Elam appeared at one of the windows. He raised the window with a single thrust of his arm, and stuck out his head. Immediately another window was raised, on the opposite corner of the house, and a woman stuck out her head. They looked at each other for a moment, and then both withdrew their heads and the windows were lowered so quickly that Max was certain that the glass had been cracked. For a few seconds he did not believe what his eyes had seen. He would not believe that he had actually seen a woman in Elam's house. But slowly the realization came to him that he had seen a woman there, a young woman with a full body and yellow hair, and he stepped backward off Elam's land into the public road.

After what he had seen, Max did not know whether to stand there looking at the house, or whether to turn and go back up the slope to his own place. He knew he would never again set foot on Elam's land, however; he had already made up his mind never to have anything more to do with Elam Stairs. He did not even wish to speak to him again. He could never forgive Elam for having brought home a woman from Lewiston.

While he stood in the road trying to make up his mind about what he was going to do, the woman he had first seen in the window came running around the corner of the house. Max stared unbelievably. Then a moment later came Elam, running faster than Max thought it possible for anyone, to run. He was overtaking the yellow-haired young woman, two strides to her one, and if they had not turned the other corner of the house at that moment, he would have seen Elam grab her. Elam had his coat off, and the woman's dress was open down her back all the way to her waist. The woman was laughing, but Elam was not.

Max waited another five minutes, wishing to be there in case they again ran around the house. Then he turned and walked slowly up the eastern slope of the intervalle. The sight of a woman at Elam's house made him wish to go over there and drive her out of the intervalle, but he knew he could never do that. Elam would not allow him to run her away. Elam would protect her, and send him back across the road.

By the time that Max had reached his own house, he had definitely made up his mind about what he was going to do. He was going to take a trip himself the following weekend. He was going down to Lewiston Saturday morning and stay there until Sunday afternoon. And while he was there he would do the same things that Elam had done.

"Elam Stairs isn't the only man in the intervalle who can bring home a woman," he said, taking his seat beside the window and looking over at the western slope

where the sun had set. He raised the window several inches so that he might hear any sound that was audible in the intervale. "Will hire me a housekeeper in Lewiston and bring her back here, too. Elam Stairs has an hour's more sunshine because his farm and buildings are on the western slope, and he thinks he can have even more advantage with a housekeeper. But he shan't. I'll show him that I can go to Lewiston and maybe get a finer-looking housekeeper than he's got."

Max hitched his chair closer to the window.

"Guess I'll chase mine thrice around the house when I bring her here," he said. "And it might be a good plan to wait till she gets right in the middle of changing her clothes to start chasing her, instead of starting after her like Elam did when she only had her dress unfastened down her back. Guess Elam Stairs will see as how I made a pretty smart deal, when he looks out his window some fine day and sees me chasing a naked housekeeper, and gaining on her three strides to her one. He chased his woman once around the house, so I'll chase mine thrice around, with maybe an extra time to show him what I can do when I get good and started."

Max paused to look out across the intervale. While he watched Elam's house, he began going through the motions of washing his hands.

"Don't guess Elam's idea was so bad, after all. Can't think of much to quarrel about with a Lewiston young woman in the house, and not having to pay her five-ten dollars for her bed over the weekend."

Country Full of Swedes

THERE I was, standing in the middle of the chamber, trembling like I was coming down with the flu, and still not knowing what god-awful something had happened. In all my days in the Back Kingdom, I never heard such noises so early in the forenoon.

It was about half an hour after sun-rise, and a gun went off like a coffer-dam breaking up under ice at twenty below, and I'd swear it sounded like it wasn't any farther away than my feet are from my head. That gun shot off, pitching me six-seven inches off the bed, and, before I could come down out of the air, there was another roar like somebody coughing through a megaphone, with a two weeks' cold, right in my ear. God-helping, I hope I never get waked up like that again until I can get myself home to the Back Kingdom where I rightfully belong to stay.

I must have stood there ten-fifteen minutes shivering in my night-shirt, my heart pounding inside of me like a ram-rod working on a plugged-up bore, and listening for that gun again, if it was going to shoot some more. A man never knows what's going to happen next in the State of Maine; that's why I wish sometimes I'd never left the Back Kingdom to begin with. I was making sixty a month, with the best of bed and board, back

there in the intervale; but like a God damn fool I had to jerk loose and come down here near the Bay. I'm going back where I came from, God-helping; I've never had a purely calm and peaceful day since I got here three-four years ago. This is the damnedest country for the unexpected raising of all kinds of unlooked-for hell a man is apt to run across in a lifetime of traveling. If a man's born and raised in the Back Kingdom, he ought to stay there where he belongs; that's what I'd done if I'd had the sense to stay out of this down-country near the Bay, where you don't ever know, God-helping, what's going to happen next, where, or when.

But there I was, standing in the middle of the upstairs chamber, shaking like a rag weed in an August wind-storm, and not knowing what minute, maybe right at me, that gun was going to shoot off again, for all I knew. Just then, though, I heard Jim and Mrs. Frost trip-trapping around downstairs in their bare feet. Even if I didn't know what god-awful something had happened, I knew things around the place weren't calm and peaceful, like they generally were of a Sunday morning in May, because it took a stiff mixture of heaven and hell to get Jim and Mrs. Frost up and out of a warm bed before six of a forenoon, any of the days of the week.

I ran to the window and stuck my head out as far as I could get it, to hear what the trouble was. Every-

thing out there was as quiet and peaceful as midnight on a backroad in middlemost winter. But I knew something was up, because Jim and Mrs. Frost didn't make a practice of getting up and out of a warm bed that time of forenoon in the chillish May-time.

There wasn't any sense in me standing there in the cold air shivering in my night-shirt, so I put on, my clothes, whistling all the time through my teeth to drive away the chill, and trying to figure out what God damn fool was around so early shooting off a gun of a Sunday morning. Just then I heard the downstairs door open, and up the steps, two at a time, came Jim in his breeches and his shirt-tail flying out behind him.

He wasn't long in coming up the stairs, for a man sixty-seven, but before he reached the door to my room, that gun went off again: BOOM! Just like that; and the echo came rolling back through the open window from the hills: *Boom! Boom!* Like fireworks going off with your eyes shut. Jim had busted through the door already, but when he heard that *Boom!* sound he sort of spun around, like a cock-eyed weathervane, five-six times, and ran out the door again like he had been shot in the hind parts with a moose gun. That *Boom!* so early in the forenoon was enough to scare the daylight out of any man, and Jim wasn't any different from me or anybody else in the town of East Joloppi. He just turned around and jumped through the door to the first tread on the stairway like his mind was made

up to go somewhere else in a hurry, and no fooling around at the start.

I'd been hired to Jim and Mrs. Frost for all of three-four years, and I was near about as much of a Frost, excepting name, as Jim himself was. Jim and me got along first-rate together, doing chores and haying and farm work in general, because neither one of us was ever trying to make the other do more of the work. We were hitched to make a fine team, and I never had a kick coming, and Jim said he didn't either. Jim had the name of Frost, to be sure, but I wouldn't ever hold that against a man.

The echo of that gun-shot was still rolling around in the hills and coming in through the window, when all at once that god-awful cough-like whoop through a megaphone sounded again right there in the room and everywhere else, like it might have been, in the whole town of East Joloppi. The man or beast or whatever animal he was who hollered like that ought to be locked up to keep him from scaring all the women and children to death, and it wasn't any stomach-comforting sound for a grown man who's used to the peaceful calm of the Back Kingdom all his life to hear so early of a Sunday forenoon, either.

I jumped to the door where Jim, just a minute before, leaped through. He didn't stop till he got clear to the bottom of the stairs. He stood there, looking up at me like a wild-eyed cow moose surprised in the sheriff's corn field.

"Who fired that god-awful shot, Jim?" I yelled at him, leaping down the stairs quicker than a man of my years ought to let himself do.

"Good God!" Jim said, his voice hoarse, and falling all to pieces like a stump of punk-wood. "The Swedes! The Swedes are shooting, Stan!"

"What Swedes, Jim—those Swedes who own the farm and buildings across the road over there?" I said, trying to find the buttonholes in my shirt. "Have they come back here to live on that farm?"

"Good God, yes!" he said, his voice croaking deep down in his throat, like he had swallowed too much water. "The Swedes are all over the place. They're everywhere you can see, there's that many of them."

"What's their name, Jim?" I asked him. "You and Mrs. Frost never told me what their name is."

"Good God, I don't know. I never heard them called anything but Swedes, and that's what it is, I guess. It ought to be that, if it ain't."

I ran across the hall to look out a window, but it was on the wrong side of the house, and I couldn't see a thing. Mrs. Frost was stepping around in the downstairs chamber, locking things up in the drawers and closet and forgetting where she was hiding the keys. I could see her through the open door, and she was more scared-looking than Jim was. She was so scared of the Swedes she didn't know what she was doing, none of the time.

"What made those Swedes come back for, Jim?" I

said to him. "I thought you said they were gone for good, this time."

"Good God, Stan," he said, "I don't know what they came back for. I guess hard times are bringing everybody back to the land, and the Swedes are always in the front rush of everything. I don't know what brought them back, but they're all over the place, shooting and yelling and raising hell. There are thirty-forty of them, looks like to me, counting everything with heads."

"What are they doing now, Jim, except yelling and shooting?"

"Good God," Jim said, looking behind him to see what Mrs. Frost was doing with his things in the downstairs chamber. "I don't know what they're not doing. But I can hear them, Stan! You hurry out right now and lock up all the tools in the barn and bring in the cows and tie them up in the stalls. I've got to hurry out now and bring in all of those new cedar fence posts across the front of the yard before they start pulling them up and carrying them off. Good God, Stan, the Swedes are everywhere you look out-doors! We've got to make haste, Stan!"

Jim ran to the side door and out the back of the house, but I took my time about going. I wasn't scared of the Swedes, like Jim and Mrs. Frost were, and I didn't aim to have Jim putting me to doing tasks and chores, or anything else, before breakfast and the proper time. I wasn't any more scared of the Swedes than I was of the Finns and Portuguese, anyway. It's a god-awful

shame for Americans to let Swedes and Finns and the Portuguese scare the day-lights out of them. God-helping, they are no different than us, and you never see a Finn or a Swede scared of an American. But people like Jim and Mrs. Frost are scared to death of Swedes and other people from the old countries; Jim and Mrs. Frost and people like that never stop to think that all of us Americans came over from the old countries, one time or another, to begin with.

But there wasn't any sense in trying to argue with Jim and Mrs. Frost right then, when the Swedes, like a fired nest of yellow-headed bumble bees, were swarming all over the place as far as the eye could see, and when Mrs. Frost was scared to death that they were coming into the house and carry out all of her and Jim's furniture and household goods. So while Mrs. Frost was tying her and Jim's shoes in pillow cases and putting them out of sight in closets and behind beds, I went to the kitchen window and looked out to see what was going on around that tall yellow house across the road.

Jim and Mrs. Frost both were right about there being Swedes all over the place. God-helping, there were Swedes all over the country, near about all over the whole town of East Joloppi, for what I could see out the window. They were as thick around the barn and pump and the woodpile as if they had been a nest of yellow-headed bumble bees strewn over the countryside. There were Swedes everywhere a man could see, and the ones that couldn't be seen, could be heard yelling

their heads off inside the yellow clapboarded house across the road. There wasn't any mistake about their being Swedes there, either; because I've never yet seen a man who mistakes a Swede or a Finn for an American. Once you see a Finn or a Swede you know, God-helping, that he is a Swede or a Finn, and not a Portuguese or an American.

There was a Swede everywhere a man could look. Some of them were little Swedes, and women Swedes, to be sure; but little Swedes, in the end, and women Swedes too, near about, grow up as big as any of them. When you come right down to it, there's no sense in counting out the little Swedes and the women Swedes.

Out in the road in front of their house were seven-eight autos and trucks loaded down with furniture and household goods. All around, everything was Swedes. The Swedes were yelling and shouting at one another, the little Swedes and the women Swedes just as loud as the big Swedes, and it looked like none of them knew what all the shouting and yelling was for, and when they found out, they didn't give a damn about it. That was because all of them were Swedes. It didn't make any difference what a Swede was yelling about; just as long as he had leave to open his mouth, he was tickled to death about it.

I have never seen the like of so much yelling and shouting anywhere else before; but down here in the State of Maine, in the down-country on the Bay, there's no sense in being taken-back at the sights to be seen, be-

cause anything on God's green earth is likely and liable to happen between day and night, and the other way around, too.

Now, you take the Finns; there's any God's number of them around in the woods, where you least expect to see them, logging and such. When a Finn crew breaks a woods camp, it looks like there's a Finn for every tree in the whole State, but you don't see them going around making the noise that Swedes do, with all their yelling and shouting and shooting off guns. Finns are quiet about their hell-raising. The Portuguese are quiet, too; you see them tramping around, minding their own business, and working hard on a river dam or something, but you never hear them shouting and yelling and shooting off guns at five-six of a Sunday morning. There's no known likeness to the noise that a houseful of Swedes can make when they get to yelling and shouting at one another early in the forenoon.

I was standing there all that time, looking out the window at the Swedes across the road, when Jim came into the kitchen with an armful of wood and threw it into the woodbox behind the range.

"Good God, Stan," Jim said, "the Swedes are everywhere you can look out-doors. They're not going to get that armful of wood, anyway, though."

Mrs. Frost came to the door and stood looking like she didn't know it was her business to cook breakfast for Jim and me. I made a fire in the range and put on a pan of water to boil for the coffee. Jim kept running

to the window to look out, and there wasn't much use in expecting Mrs. Frost to start cooking unless somebody set her to it, in the shape she was in, with all the Swedes around the place. She was so up-set, it was a downright pity to look at her. But Jim and me had to eat, and I went and took her by the arm and brought her to the range and left her standing there so close she would get burned if she didn't stir around and make breakfast.

"Good God, Stan," Jim said, "those Swedes are into everything. They're in the barn, and in the pasture running the cows, and I don't know what else they've been into since I looked last. They'll take the tools and the horses and cows, and the cedar posts, too, if we don't get out there and put everything under lock and key."

"Now, hold on, Jim," I said, looking out the window. "Them you see are little Swedes out there, and they're not going to make off with anything of yours and Mrs. Frost's. The big Swedes are busy carrying in furniture and household goods. Those Swedes aren't going to tamper with anything of yours and Mrs. Frost's. They're people just like us. They don't go around stealing everything in sight. Now, let's just sit here by the window and watch them while Mrs. Frost is getting breakfast ready."

"Good God, Stan, they're Swedes," Jim said, "and they're moving into the house across the road. I've got to put everything under lock and key before——"

"Hold on, Jim," I told him. "It's their house they're

moving into. God-helping, they're not moving into your and Jim's house, are they, Mrs. Frost?"

"Jim," Mrs. Frost said, shaking her finger at him and looking at me wild-eyed and sort of flustered-like, "Jim, don't you sit there and let Stanley stop you from saving the stock and tools. Stanley doesn't know the Swedes like we do. Stanley came down here from the Back Kingdom, and he doesn't know anything about Swedes."

Mrs. Frost was partly right, because I've never seen the things in my whole life that I've seen down here near the Bay; but there wasn't any sense in Americans like Jim and Mrs. Frost being scared of Swedes. I've seen enough Finns and Portuguese in my time in the Back Kingdom, up in the intervale, to know that Americans are no different from the others.

"Now, you hold on a while, Jim," I said. "Swedes are no different than Finns. Finns don't go around stealing another man's stock and tools. Up in the Back Kingdom the Finns are the finest kind of neighbors."

"That may be so up in the Back Kingdom, Stan," Jim said, "but Swedes down here near the Bay are nothing like anything that's ever been before or since. Those Swedes over there across the road work in a pulp mill over to Waterville three-four years, and when they've got enough money saved up, or when they lose it all, as the case may be, they all move back here to East Joloppi on this farm of theirs for two-three years at a time. That's what they do. And they've been doing

it for the past thirty-forty years, ever since I can remember, and they haven't changed none in all that time. I can recall the first time they came to East Joloppi; they built that house across the road then, and if you've ever seen a sight like Swedes building a house in a hurry, you haven't got much else to live for. Why! Stan, those Swedes built that house in four-five days—just-like that! I've never seen the equal to it. Of course now, Stan, it's the damnedest-looking house a man ever saw, because it's not a farm house, and it's not a city house, and it's no kind of a house an American would erect. Why! those Swedes threw that house together in four-five days—just like that! But whoever saw a house like that before, with three storeys to it, and only six rooms in the whole building! And painted yellow, too; Good God, Stan, white is the only color to paint a house, and those Swedes went and painted it yellow. Then on top of that, they went and painted the barn red. And of all of the shouting and yelling, at all times of the day and night, a man never saw or heard before. Those Swedes acted like they were purely crazy for the whole of four-five days, and they were, and they still are. But what gets me is the painting of it yellow, and the making of it three storeys high, with only six rooms in the whole building. Nobody but Swedes would go and do a thing like that; an American would have built a farm house, here in the country, resting square on the ground, with one storey, maybe a storey and a half, and then painted it lead-white. But Good God, Stan,

those fool Swedes had to put up three storeys, to hold six rooms, and then went and painted the building yellow."

"Swedes are a little queer, sometimes," I said. "But Finns and Portuguese are too, Jim. And Americans sometimes——"

"A little queer!" Jim said. "Why! Good God, Stan, the Swedes are the queerest people on the earth, if that's the right word for them. You don't know Swedes, Stan. This is the first time you've ever seen those Swedes across the road, and that's why you don't know what they're like after being shut up in a pulpwood mill over to Waterville for four-five years. They're purely wild, I tell you, Stan. They don't stop for anything they set their heads on. If you was to walk out there now and tell them to move their autos and trucks off of the town road so the travelers could get past without having to drive around through the brush, they'd tear you apart, they're that wild, after being shut up in the pulp mill over to Waterville these three-four, maybe four-five, years."

"Finns get that way, too," I tried to tell Jim. "After Finns have been shut up in a woods camp all winter, they make a lot of noise when they get out. Everybody who has to stay close to the job for three-four years likes to act free when he gets out from under the job. Now, Jim, you take the Portuguese——"

"Don't you sit there, Jim, and let Stanley keep you from putting the tools away," Mrs. Frost said. "Stanley

doesn't know the Swedes like we do. He's lived up in the Back Kingdom most of his life, tucked away in the intervale, and he's never seen Swedes——"

"Good God, Stan," Jim said, standing up, he was that nervous and up-set, "the Swedes are over-running the whole country. I'll bet there are more Swedes in the town of East Joloppi than there are in the rest of the country. Everybody knows there's more Swedes in the State of Maine than there are in the old country. Why! Jim, they take to this State like potato bugs take to——"

"Don't you sit there and let Stanley keep you back, Jim," Mrs. Frost put in again. "Stanley doesn't know the Swedes like we do. Stanley's lived up there in the Back Kingdom most of his life."

Just then one of the big Swedes started yelling at some of the little Swedes and women Swedes. I'll swear, those big Swedes sounded like a pastureful of hoarse bulls, near the end of May, mad about the black-flies. God-helping, they yelled like they were fixing to kill all the little Swedes and women Swedes they could get their hands on. It didn't amount to anything, though; because the little Swedes and the women Swedes yelled right back at them just like they had been big Swedes too. The little Swedes and women Swedes couldn't yell hoarse bull bass, but it was close enough to it to make a man who's lived most of his life up in the Back Kingdom, in the intervale, think that the whole town of East Joloppi was full of big Swedes.

Jim was all for getting out after the tools and stock

right away, but I pulled him back to the table. I wasn't going to let Jim and Mrs. Frost set me to doing tasks and chores before breakfast and the regular time. Forty dollars a month isn't much to pay a man for ten-eleven hours' work a day, including Sundays, when the stock has to be attended to like any other day, and I set myself that I wasn't going to work twelve-thirteen hours a day for them, even if I was practically one of the Frosts myself, except in name, by that time.

"Now, hold on a while, Jim," I said. "Let's just sit here by the window and watch them carry their furniture and household goods inside while Mrs. Frost's getting the cooking ready to eat. If they start taking off any of you and Mrs. Frost's things, we can see them just as good from here by the window as we could out there in the yard and road."

"Now, Jim, I'm telling you," Mrs. Frost said, shaking all over, and not even trying to cook us a meal, "don't you sit there and let Stanley keep you from saving the stock and tools. Stanley doesn't know the Swedes like we do. He thinks they're like everybody else."

Jim wasn't for staying in the house when all of his tools were lying around in the yard, and while his cows were in the pasture unprotected, but he saw how it would be better to wait where we could hurry up Mrs. Frost with the cooking, if we were ever going to eat breakfast that forenoon. She was so excited and nervous about the Swedes moving back to East Joloppi from the pulp

mill in Waterville that she hadn't got the beans and brown bread fully heated from the night before and we had to sit and eat them cold.

We were sitting there by the window eating the cold beans and brown bread, and watching the Swedes, when two of the little Swedes started running across Jim and Mrs. Frost's lawn. They were chasing one of their big yellow tom cats they had brought with them from Waterville. The yellow tom was as large as an eight-months collie puppy, and he ran like he was on fire and didn't know how to put it out. His great big bushy tail stuck straight up in the air behind him, like a flag, and he was leaping over the lawn like a devilish calf, new-born.

Jim and Mrs. Frost saw the little Swedes and the big yellow tom cat at the same time I did.

"Good God," Jim shouted, raising himself part out of the chair. "Here they come now!"

"Hold on now, Jim," I said, pulling him back to the table. "They're only chasing one of their tom cats. They're not after taking anything that belongs to you and Mrs. Frost. Let's just sit here and finish eating the beans, and watch them out the window."

"My crown in heaven!" Mrs. Frost cried out, running to the window and looking through. "Those Swedes are going to kill every plant on the place. They'll dig up all the bulbs and pull up all the vines in the flower bed."

"Now you just sit and calm yourself, Mrs. Frost," I told her. "Those little Swedes are just chasing a tom cat. They're not after doing hurt to your flowers."

The big Swedes were unloading the autos and trucks and carrying the furniture and household goods into their three-storey, yellow clapboarded house. None of them was paying any attention to the little Swedes chasing the yellow tom over Jim and Mrs. Frost's lawn.

Just then the kitchen door burst open, and the two little Swedes stood there looking at us, panting and blowing their heads off.

Mrs. Frost took one look at them, and then she let out a yell, but the kids didn't notice her at all.

"Hey," one of them shouted, "come out here and help us get the cat. He climbed up in one of your trees."

By that time, Mrs. Frost was all for slamming the door in their faces, but I pushed in front of her and went out into the yard with them. Jim came right behind me, after he had finished calming Mrs. Frost, and telling her we wouldn't let the Swedes come and carry out her furniture and household goods.

The yellow tom was all the way up in one of Jim's young maple shade trees. The maple wasn't strong enough to support even the smallest of the little Swedes, if he should take it into his head to climb to the top after the cat, and neither Jim nor me was hurting ourselves trying to think of a way to get the feline down. We were all for letting the cat stay where he was, till

he got ready to come down of his own free will, but the little Swedes couldn't wait for anything. They wanted the tom right away, then and there, and no wasting of time in getting him.

"You boys go home and wait for the cat to come down," Jim told them. "There's no way to make him come down now, till he gets ready to come down of his own mind."

But no, those two boys were little Swedes. They weren't thinking of going back home till they got the yellow tom down from the maple. One of them ran to the tree, before Jim or me could head him off, and started shinnying up it like a pop-eyed squirrel. In no time, it seemed to me like, he was up amongst the limbs, jumping around up there from one limb to another like he had been brought up in just such a tree.

"Good God, Stan," Jim said, "can't you keep them out of the trees?"

There was no answer for that, and Jim knew there wasn't. There's no way of stopping a Swede from doing what he has set his head on doing.

The boy got almost to the top branch, where the yellow tom was clinging and spitting, when the tree began to bend towards the house. I knew what was coming, if something wasn't done about it pretty quick, and so did Jim. Jim saw his young maple shade tree begin to bend, and he almost had a fit looking at it. He ran to the lumber stack and came back dragging two lengths of two-by-fours. He got them set up against the tree be-

fore it had time to do any splitting, and then we stood there, like two damn fools, shoring up the tree and yelling at the little Swede to come down out of there before we broke his neck for being up in it.

The big Swedes across the road heard the fuss we were making, and they came running out of that three storey, six room house like it had been on fire inside.

"Good God, Stan," Jim shouted at me, "here comes the Swedes!"

"Don't turn and run off, Jim," I cautioned him, yanking him back by his coat-tail. "They're not wild beasts; we're not scared of them. Hold on where you are, Jim."

I could see Mrs. Frost's head almost breaking through the window-glass in the kitchen. She was all for coming out and driving the Swedes off her lawn and out of her flowers, but she was too scared to unlock the kitchen door and open it.

Jim was getting ready to run again, when he saw the Swedes coming toward us like a nest of yellow-headed bumble bees, but I wasn't scared of them, and I held on to Jim's coat-tail and told him I wasn't. Jim and me were shoring up the young maple, and I knew if one of us let go, the tree would bend to the ground right away and split wide open right up the middle. There was no sense in ruining a young maple shade tree like that, and I told Jim there wasn't.

"Hey," one of the big Swedes shouted at the little Swede up in the top of the maple, "come down out of that tree and go home to your mother."

"Aw, to hell with the old lady," the little Swede shouted down. "I'm getting the cat by the tail."

The big Swede looked at Jim and me. Jim was almost ready to run again by that time, but I wasn't, and I held him and told him I wasn't. There was no sense in letting the Swedes scare the day-lights out of us.

"What in hell can you do with kids when they get that age?" he asked Jim and me.

Jim was all for telling him to make the boy come down out of the maple before it bent over and split wide open, but I knew there was no sense in trying to make him come down out of there until he got good and ready to come, or else got the yellow tom by the tail.

Just then another big Swede came running out of that three storey, six room house across the road, holding a double-bladed ax out in front of him, like it was a red-hot poker, and yelling for all he was worth at the other Swedes.

"Good God, Stan," Jim said, "don't let those Swedes cut down my young maple!"

I had lots better sense than to try to make the Swedes stop doing what they had set their heads on doing. A man would be purely a fool to try to stop it from raining from above when it got ready to, even if he was trying to get his corn crop planted.

I looked around again, and there was Mrs. Frost all but popping through the window-glass. I could see what she was thinking, but I couldn't hear a word she was

saying. It was good and plenty though, whatever it was.

"Come down out of that tree!" the Swede yelled at the boy up in Jim's maple.

Instead of starting to climb down, the little Swede reached up for the big yellow tom cat's tail. The tom reached out a big fat paw and harried the boy five-six times, just like that, quicker than the eye could follow. The kid let out a yell and a shout that must have been heard all the way to the other side of town, sounding like a whole houseful of Swedes up in the maple.

The big Swede covered the distance to the tree in one stride, pushing everything behind him.

"Good God, Stan," Jim shouted at me, "we've got to do something!"

There wasn't anything a man could do, unless he was either a Swede himself, or a man of prayer. Americans like Jim and me had no business getting in a Swede's way, especially when he was swinging a big double-bladed ax, and he just out of a pulp mill after being shut up making paper four-five years.

The big Swede grabbed the ax and let go at the trunk of the maple with it. There was no stopping him then, because he had the ax going, and it was whipping around his shoulders like a cow's tail in a swarm of black-flies. The little maple shook all over every time the ax-blade struck it, like wind blowing a corn stalk, and then it began to bend on the other side from Jim and me where we were shoring it up with the two-by-fours. Chips as big as dinner plates were flying across the lawn and

pelting the house like a gang of boys stoning telephone insulators. One of those big dinner-plate chips crashed through the window where Mrs. Frost was, about that time. Both Jim and me thought at first she had fallen through the window, but when we looked again, we could see that she was still on the inside, and madder than ever at the Swedes.

The two-by-fours weren't any good any longer, because it was too late to get to the other side of the maple in time to keep it from bending in that direction. The Swede with the double-bladed ax took one more swing, and the tree began to bend towards the ground.

The tree came down, the little Swede came down, and the big yellow tom came down on top of everything, holding for all he was worth to the top of the little Swede's head. Long before the tree and the boy struck the ground, the big yellow tom had sprung what looked like thirty feet, and landed in the middle of Mrs. Frost's flowers and bulbs. The little Swede let out a yell and a whoop when he hit the ground that brought out six-seven more Swedes from that three storey, six room house, piling out into the road like it was the first time they had ever heard a kid bawl. The women Swedes and the little Swedes and the big Swedes piled out on Jim and Mrs. Frost's front lawn like they had been dropped out of a dump-truck and didn't know which was straight up from straight down.

I thought Mrs. Frost was going to have a fit right then and there in the kitchen window. When she saw

that swarm of Swedes coming across her lawn, and the big yellow tom cat in her flower bed among the tender plants and bulbs, digging up the things she had planted, and the Swedes with their No. 12 heels squashing the green shoots she had been nursing along—well, I guess she just sort of caved in, and fell out of sight for the time being. I didn't have time to run to see what was wrong with her, because Jim and me had to tear out behind the tom and the Swedes to try to save as much as we could.

"Good God, Stan," Jim shouted at me, "go run in the house and ring up all the neighbors on the line, and tell them to hurry over here and help us before the Swedes wreck my farm and buildings. There's no telling what they'll do next. They'll be setting fire to the house and barn the next thing, maybe. Hurry, Stan!"

I didn't have time to waste talking to the neighbors on the telephone line. I was right behind Jim and the Swedes to see what they were going to do next.

"I pay you good pay, Stan," Jim said, "and I want my money's worth. Now, you go ring up the neighbors and tell them to hurry."

The big yellow tom made one more spring when he hit the flower bed, and that leap landed him over the stonewall. He struck out for the deep woods with every Swede on the place behind him. When Jim and me got to the stonewall, I pulled up short and held Jim back.

"Well, Jim," I said, "if you want me to, I'll go down in the woods and raise hell with every Swede on

the place for cutting down your young maple and tearing up Mrs. Frost's flower-bed."

We turned around and there was Mrs. Frost, right behind us. There was no knowing how she got there so quick after the Swedes had left for the woods.

"My crown in heaven," Mrs. Frost said, running up to Jim and holding on to him. "Jim, don't let Stanley make the Swedes mad. This is the only place we have got to live in, and they'll be here a year now this time, maybe two-three, if the hard times don't get better soon."

"That's right, Stan," he said. "You don't know the Swedes like we do. You would have to be a Swede yourself to know what to tell them. Don't go over there doing anything like that."

"God-helping, Jim," I said, "you and Mrs. Frost aren't scared of the Swedes, are you?"

"Good God, no," he said, his eyes popping out; "but don't go making them mad."

